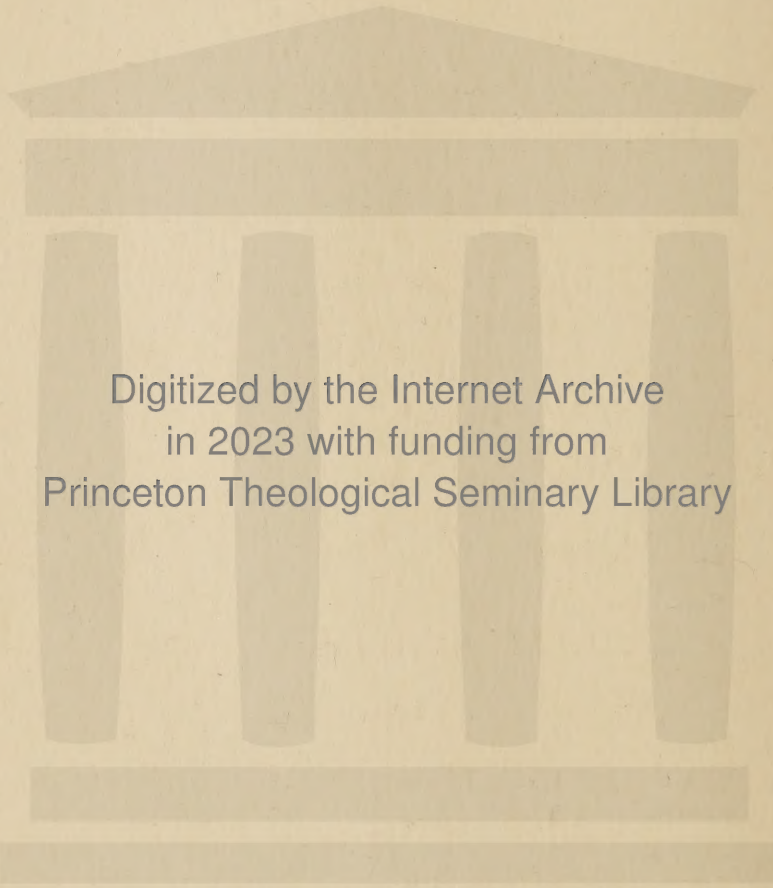


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evangelist





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A CONTRIBUTION TO
BELIEF IN REVIVAL

BY
EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, D. D.

*Author of "The Fascination of the Book,"
"The Bible in English Literature"*



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*As a Token
of long friendship and affection
this volume is dedicated to*
WILLIAM OXLEY THOMPSON
*distinguished preacher
and educator*

Foreword

MANY aspiring spirits in the world to-day are looking earnestly for "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." They believe that signs of their coming are already apparent. There is to them "the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees." They are convinced, not only of the possibility, but of the certainty, of revival.

This expectation of spiritual refreshing from God is first of all a matter of the heart's desire. But it is much more than this. Desire is a filmy substance for the soul to grasp. Much more substantial is the conviction in the minds of believers that the Spirit of God is likely to break forth in new movements of grace and power. Such movements many are waiting for and expecting. Often in the past God has met the despair and sin of men with floods of grace and mercy. So there are sensitive souls in all lands that feel the sweep of divine power. The tide is making. God is mindful of His heritage.

Spiritual conditions in the world are appalling. There is no longer any doubt about sin. We begin to understand the reason for Calvary. Frank attempts have been made to dilute sin and apolo-

gize for it, and thus to weaken the claims of the Christian religion. If sin is not something to be pardoned, what need is there for a Saviour with a cross and a plan of salvation? But these efforts have proved futile. More than ever sin is real and direful, and man is a sinner needing abundant pardon and salvation. These are sad times, and sinful too, but they are wistful times. The world knows the weakness and inefficiency of its own resources. "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Humanity is an infant crying in the night, "with no language but a cry." Faith is the greatest need of men—all the more because the generation is so strong. If one can add a single grain of faith to his neighbour's way of thinking in the growing irreligiousness of our times, he proves himself his best friend. Whosoever can contribute even a little to the spiritual life of this naked giant, modern civilization, is a true benefactor of mankind. All the deepest needs men have are spiritual.

Probably never before in history has the Christian Church had such an opportunity as now. The Church is the most severely criticized institution in the world. Some of its most unrelenting critics are among its friends. It deserves criticism. No amount of explanation and apology can hide its failings. Too often it is stagnant in a world that is full of stir and aspiration. It lacks imagination,

wonder, creative power, faith, in an age that is shaping great events on the wheel of progress.

Notwithstanding all this and more the Church is the true spiritual Israel, "whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ," in the spirit. The ministry of grace and salvation for generations has resided in the Church. It still resides there. Its deposit of spiritual teaching and life makes it the most valuable asset of nations. It is "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

In times like these when the Spirit of God is moving mysteriously among men, no believer can be free from anxiety. Is the Church prepared for such an unprecedented opportunity—such an open door as has not been set before it since apostolic days? Is the Church ready to put on its garments of praise and prayer and go forth with the cross of Christ to new victories of salvation? The main issue for the Church to-day is as it was in the first days, the winning of men to God in Christ. Let the Church do the "first works." There are resources enough. Is the spirit strong? Is the faith ample? Is the courage undaunted? Once more the Church must undertake a crusade for Christ and His Gospel. The world is dying. The Church dare not sit by, like Jonah, "till he might see what would become of the city."

Evangelism is the urgent need of the hour in the Church. Evangelism of pastors in their pulpits and parishes, evangelism that is more than a method—a spirit, a force. The ministers of the churches are the evangelists. Why not? Who can better turn the full resource of the Church toward winning and saving men? Who better understand the spiritual values of the ordinary means of grace in the Church? Who are better able by spiritual genius and initiative to mark out new and unusual ways of reaching men? Intensive preaching of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ will make any man an evangelist. If any of us feel that we do not know how to be evangelists, let the crying needs of the times teach us how. If the Church shall not take on its promised grace and power for such a time as this, how shall the world live? If ministers do not preach like living men to men who are called to live—how shall men find the way of life in Christ?

E. W. W.

New York.

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I

SPIRITUAL STRATEGIES



GLANCE at the world's life to-day is not calculated to inspire optimism. Sin is deeper and darker than ever. Its grip upon humanity is not lessened. Everywhere it couches unafraid and insolent at the door. The heart of man is desperately wicked. Unbelief flourishes in all directions. Irreligion proclaims itself even in respectable sections of society with a strange sense of pride. Atheism flaunts itself openly and demands consideration as a theory of life.

More than all the sons of Gallio are on the increase. Indifference spreads among men. Multitudes are cold, hard, wrapped in deadly unconcern, caring not for these things. In wide areas of human life there is no spiritual solicitude. With many there is not enough interest to provoke inquiry. Not the careless mob merely, but many also who really think about the world and its problems, seem to have "led God to the edge of his universe and bowed him politely off the stage." Radical hostilities to religion also are breeding in the world to-day that bode ill for the welfare of humanity. The apostle Paul's description of the spiritual desti-

tution of men before Christ touched them is more than ever applicable to-day,—“dead through your trespasses and sins.”

Desperate as the situation was in the apostle's day, it was not hopeless then, it is not hopeless now. The apostle himself immediately states the ground of a true Christian optimism. “But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

The cross of Jesus is still in the field. The world is more than ever the subject of redemption. Along with wide-spreading sin and irreligion there is profound spiritual hunger in the world. Spiritual destitution such as the world is experiencing to-day brings forth sorrow, pain and fear. The still sad music of humanity fills the air. Doors are shut on every side. But great longings lie behind them. The soul of humanity groans and travails. There are multitudes who are truly seekers after God and light. But they know not the way of the soul's salvation.

In days like these the Church of Jesus Christ is needed as never before. The world's anguish is so real: the Church's anxiety must be just as real. If the Church should fail to magnify its spiritual strategies in these sad and awful hours of battle

with sin, its fault will be very grave. The real problems of life are spiritual in their nature. On the surface they are social, economic, industrial, political. At bottom they have to do with spiritual faith and life. It is therefore famine of the bread of life that lies at the heart of the world's trouble. Where shall a cure be found if not in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? If there be no balm in Gilead the tragedy of life is beyond recovery. "Having no hope and without God—in the world"!

It is no day for the Church to stop thinking about revival. Least of all to stop believing in revival. It is revival of religion that is needed. The world needs it. The Church itself needs it. The Church has its own confessions to make. It has been slow of belief, lacking in eagerness. It has been static and stolid, not deeply stirred, not moved by great emotion to intense endeavour. It has been at ease like Moab, settled on its lees, "and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel." It has been wrapped in Laodicean comfort, custom and convention. The fires of spiritual passion have burned low. It has not loved, served, sacrificed, after the manner of the Saviour's love, service and sacrifice. It is content with soft measures. It is willing to drift beautifully in the current of its forms, rubrics, ceremonies, societies, services, while the world is dying. The Church is too complacent in these times of storm and stress. The best friends of the Christian Church to-day would re-

joyce to see it lifted off its feet in some new and powerful movement of the Spirit of God. Surely the day is at hand. The Church needs revival. Its own life must be saved, before it can save others.

Conditions without and within the Church call for the emphasis of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. No one who knows the real power of Christianity can for one moment doubt that its resources are sufficient for our times. The battle is on. It remains for the Church to summon all the spiritual strategies of the Christian religion. Soft measures are not enough. A complacent Church cannot meet the desperate needs of the present time. If the Church has strong measures to use, let it use them now. If the Church can still work wonders of grace through faith and prayer, let it use such forces now. If the Church's passion for souls has grown dull and cold, let it renew its fires once more at Calvary. If the Church has grown apathetic toward its own rich possessions, its covenant of grace, its ordinances and sacraments, its Holy Bible and quickening Spirit, its cross of Calvary, its broken tomb in the garden, let it humbly confess and deplore its meagre faith and cry aloud for new measures of the Spirit's power. If the Church has come to love easy things and has ceased to think of the stern and thoroughgoing ways of the Gospel, repentance, faith, regeneration, conversion, obedi-

ence, let it come back again to the cross and then go out and preach to men. Only a sacrificial Church can bring men to God in Christ.

“Lord, increase our faith.” “Lord, teach us to pray.” “Lord, open thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” “Lord, brand thy Church and thy ministers with the marks of Jesus.” In a world like ours something more than surface treatment is required. Nothing but the sheer emphasis of the love of God, the persuasive and atoning power of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the reviving and overturning grace of the Holy Spirit, can avail to move a world like ours.

It is a fatal mistake for the Church to give up evangelism. Evangelism is the permanent business of the Church. It is also one of the noblest and most inspiring undertakings of the Gospel. So far from abandoning it, the Church should use it with greater faith, intelligence and confidence than ever before. It is true that evangelism has suffered disrepute. Too often it has dwindled into mere tactics, devices, almost tricks of the trade. But this does not discharge the Church from the true spiritual strategies of evangelism. It may turn its back upon certain exaggerated forms, but this does not mean that the Church is done with evangelism. If there have been triviality, familiarity and commonness in its tactics, let the Church free itself from the mere mechanics of salvation. But let it

realize all the more the call of the free and joyous spirit of a soul-winning Gospel. Let it study the meaning, the depth and breadth, the changing varieties of evangelism for the present time. One thing is certain, the time is at hand for greater ventures than ever before, for new and strong interpretations of grace.

The term evangelism needs clearer interpretation. It has been too narrowly defined. It means much more than the ordinary use suggests. It is broader and more varied than has been supposed. A better understanding of it would remove many objections. It is not merely a way of doing things, holding meetings of an unusual kind, singing, praying and preaching in a certain extraordinary fashion. It is not simply a set of methods. It is a spirit as well as a method. It is a spirit before it is a method. Naturally when the Church applies itself more intently to winning men to Christ, it thinks of aggressive ways and means. The inventive genius of the Gospel is not to be unduly curbed. A minister will not allow the free flow of the Gospel to be checked by conventionality. The Church has suffered not a little from its own dignity and restraint. One of the signs of the presence of the spirit of evangelism is the ready play of the services, forms, and ways of the Church, in the mighty business of redemption.

The Gospel is unusual, extraordinary, startling, sensational. But it is never common, never lack-

ing in refinement, courtesy, genuine spiritual taste, decency and order. To associate the Gospel of Christ in any manner with vulgarity is an offense against the Spirit. Methods of whatsoever kind can never take the place of strong faith, believing prayer, contact with the life-giving Word, dependence upon the moving Spirit of God, together with sincere, eager, straightforward preaching of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. Beware lest entanglement in method clip the wings and wound the soul of the Church. Rightly understood, evangelism is the irrepressible energy of the saving Gospel going out to bring men to God, and to lay their hearts and lives alongside the life and death of Jesus Christ the Saviour of men. Of this we can never have enough.


Probably the greatest spiritual strategy of the Church to-day is its preaching. Preaching in an age like this is greater business than ever before. To know what preaching is, what are its real object and aim, what are the deep ways and forces of it, what are its checks and restraints, and what are its spiritual liberties in the Gospel, are questions for the modern preacher to ask and answer. The Christian pulpit has never known better scholarship, more wide-spread eloquence, more genuine devotion than to-day. To say that it fails of interest, instruction, personal benefit, would be a railing accusation without reason. Yet there are vagaries, broad advertisements, sensations of the

pulpit to-day that have little if any justification. More than all there are "peering littlenesses," things out of the way, matters remote from the main subjects of the Gospel, that are absorbing large energies of the pulpit.

The challenge of evangelism to the ministers of our day is tremendous. Who shall do the work of winning men to God in Christ if not His ministers? The time is at hand when evangelism must be the spirit of the Church and its ministry. There is room always for occasional evangelism. "And some, evangelists." But the demand is broader than this. Every minister his own evangelist. He himself is God's way and method. He can watch over souls with passionate interest. He can employ the usual means of grace to the definite end of winning souls. He can from time to time find new and unusual ways and means of grace. More than all else, he can intensify his preaching, give it powerful concentration, make it direct, passionate, personal, persuasive. He will not be content with any kind of trivial or merely general preaching of the Gospel. He will seek out the great texts, the high themes, the deep calls, the saving truths of the Gospel, and will lay them upon the souls and consciences of men. He will testify with winsomeness and power and great grace will be upon him.

II

NEW TIMES AND OLD FORCES

HERE are those who speak apologetically of religious conditions to-day. "Ah! well," they say, "we are living in new times." As if the new and different days to which we belong in a manner explain and atone for the lapse of interest in spiritual things. Certainly they do not realize what they say, else they would measure their words more carefully. Almost, if not altogether, they imply that our age, being as it is so strong and understanding, is less in need of religion than former ages were.

It is true that human life now is extraordinarily resourceful. The intelligence of the human mind is startling in the extreme. The success that men attain in many lines of study and endeavour is brilliant beyond words. Perhaps it is not strange that some are beguiled into thinking that the needs that were felt by former generations do not exist to-day. Thus there grows up in a brilliant age like ours a feeling of self-assertiveness and overconfidence. Men become independent in their thinking, they lose their childlike simplicity and trust. Being increased with temporal and intel-

lectual goods, they have need of nothing. They may be miserable and poor and blind and naked, yet they imagine that they are rich and amply clothed. Many books of our times reflect this opinion. Society does not need religion. The Church is obsolete. Preachers are an obstruction to freedom of thought. Their function is a thing of the past. The rôle of prophet is out of place in highly trained circles. The whole tendency with those who speak in this way is to dismiss religion, or at least to dilute and weaken it. It may be tolerated, but it is not needed. The vigorous thinking of our strong age has left it far behind.

Nothing can exceed the pathos of this state of mind. There is no pity too profound to indulge and no words too tender to speak, to those who believe that they have outgrown the need of religion. A strong and confident world that knows and achieves beyond all dreams of past days, a drifting world that regrets not its ancient moorings—how shall the Church, and especially the ministry of the Church, meet a tragic sorrow such as this?

Some tell us that the Church must adapt and adjust its message to new times. And indeed such counsel is not to be neglected. New studies, improved scholarship, clearer understanding, even changed points of view, make adaptations necessary. It is a fatal mistake for the Church to ignore the best that a strong age can produce in the

way of intellectual enlightenment. Such aid in fact not infrequently arises in the sacred circles of the Church itself. The true touch of devotion is upon it, the fragrance of familiar altar-fires is round about it. The Church and its ministry can no more escape the intellectual stimulus of our times than the eye that is open can avoid rays of light from the sun. Whatsoever new and true light springs from the pages of the holy Book, whatsoever new, even if unusual, leadings of the Spirit of God, comes to men in their devout studies and meditations, let them be made welcome as aids in winning men to Christ.

The plea for adjustment of the Christian message occasions some fears. It may easily proceed too far. It may tend to devitalize the Gospel, leave it cold in its content and ineffective in its contact. Take the case of a young man entering the Christian ministry in these new times. It is wise that he should be fully and widely instructed. He must know history, literature, psychology, science. He cannot do otherwise than relate these subjects to his study of the Bible, to his theology, and to the Gospel that he preaches. He may find new terms that will be better understood. His approach to Christian truth may be different, more comprehensive. He will rightly seek ways of adapting his message to the wider understanding that has come in upon the minds of our times. But there is one thing that he cannot and must

not do. He must not pare down his message. He cannot on any account allow it to lack in passion. He dare not show insecurity in faith and conviction. Let the young minister be full of knowledge, but let him never be rigid and cold in his knowledge. All the more because of other studies, let him study the Word of God, exploring its depths and climbing its heights. And like the Master let him know men, understanding what is in them.

Adaptation to be sure, but always in the interest of a stronger appeal of the Gospel. True to the old with ever a better understanding of the old: faithful to the new with ever a better understanding of the new. No compromise with the facts of life—sin, sorrow, pain, spiritual desolation, loss of the soul, need of God's love, the Saviour's cross, and the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet with all this fidelity of the friends of religion to the things that cannot be moved, there must needs be a spirit of approach to our age and an effort to comprehend its conditions and problems. Inevitably almost every movement of the Church toward accommodation and comprehension will be hailed by some as compromise and surrender. The Church must persevere however in its sincere desire to know the times and to minister comprehensively to the people who live to-day.

An attitude of utter inflexibility and rigidity upon the part of the Church and its ministry to-day only adds complexity and difficulty to the situ-

ation. The Church cannot hope to come effectively to the modern world with a rich evangelism unless it has tried prayerfully to understand what the modern world is and what its problems are. There is constant use of course for a driving attitude toward unbelief. Believing souls are responsible for the faith—especially for their own faith. Obligation rests always upon Christians to be able to state a reason for the faith that is in them. The Christian apologetic, the forensic of the pulpit, is not yet out of date, and will not be for many a day. But if a minister thinks that his best service in the pulpit is to defend the faith, to argue the way of the Gospel into human hearts, to batter down resistance by debate, he may not be wholly mistaken in his judgment of himself. But we fear that his way of ministering to the needs of men may be a bitter disappointment to the Master.

We have in mind a pastor who began his ministry in this way. He imagined that preaching the Gospel meant argument. He seldom preached a sermon in which he did not discuss something—some difficulty or problem. He set up men of straw and fired away at them. He became an adept in religious debate. If he heard of any one who had made a misstep in theology he was hot on his heels. He felt that he was called to defend the faith, and it was no unimportant service that he rendered. "But," said he, "I spent ten years in the pulpit before I began to realize that it was a

lean kind of ministry that I was carrying on. All the while that I was trying to support positive things of faith I was really dwelling in the atmosphere of negative things. Slowly I realized that this is not the way to feed hungry hearts. I found out that there is a finer instrument than logic, and that is the winning of men by understanding and sympathy. It dawned upon me slowly that the world is tired of debate, and that what it wants is spiritual food, with confidence of mind. So I stopped arguing with people about religion and began to persuade them to follow Christ." The experience of this minister has its enlightenment for us all.

Our generation has gone through strange and trying experiences. The studies of men have been revealing. Often they have tended to uneasiness and distrust. Prosperity has not always proved a friend of the soul. The Prince of the powers of the air has not infrequently been at work through the very tools of civilization and progress. Insidious influences have conspired to make faith difficult and the religious life more complex. The doubts of men in this age are not to be condoned more than in other ages. Nor is it to be forgotten that sin couches at the door. But at least the doubts and trying experiences of men are to be understood, if possible, and to be ministered to with loyalty to truth and fidelity to souls.

The most difficult thing for example that a pas-

tor has to do at the present moment is to minister successfully to the youth of the Church and the world. It cannot be done without the guiding principles of love, sympathy and understanding. The sheer passion for souls will guide the minister through many troubles with young people. He will seek to be the master of the keys of youth, and he will not fail to suffuse his ministry with tenderness and longing. Like the Lord Himself he will look upon the young man and love him.


But the ministry of the Church and its teachers to an age like ours cannot be a shallow ministry. It must grip the things that cannot be moved. It must give intense reality to spiritual things. It will never concede even in the faintest way that the age can do without religion. It will remain convinced indeed that times of unbelief and irreligion are also times of deep wistfulness of soul. It will have no half measures to propose for the world's sin. It will probe beneath the surface and will see that the real need is for atonement and forgiveness. It will therefore labour in season and out of season to bring men to the cross of Christ, the only cure for sin-sick souls.

The preaching for these times should be more than ever prophetic. It will have no uncertain sound. It will be full of the double passion of love to God and love to men. It will echo the sternness of Sinai and radiate the warmth and sympathy of Calvary. It will banish coldness

as a tool of Satan. Our times need light, comfort, warmth, penetrative sympathy, as the body needs food. To help men to find God, to point the way eagerly to the cross of Christ, to bring to them the adequate consolation of the Comforter, nothing can take the place of these old forces of the Gospel for times that are new. That Ananias at Damascus who laid his hands, in a house on the street called Straight, upon the shoulders of a man blinded by his strange experiences, and called him "Brother Saul," preaching to him Jesus until the scales fell from his eyes, is a fitting picture of the preacher in these new and difficult days.

III

WONDERING ANGELS

HE first chapter of the First Epistle of Peter is one of the monumental chapters of the New Testament. In a few revealing sentences the apostle sums up the Gospel of Christ. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, the living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, the faith that is more precious than gold despite its proving by fire, the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, the early searching out of these wonderful things by the prophets, the present preaching of them through the power of the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, and the gracious personal experience of this redemption not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, but "with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

In the midst of all this, as a comment on the amazing Gospel, startling words are found—"which things angels desire to look into." Angels in heaven are struck with wonder at the Gospel and they stoop down with spiritual curiosity and amazement to peer deeply into these things. But

angels cannot understand. They are a separate order of uncreated beings. They know nothing of earth, of sin, of salvation. They are not subjects of redemption. They can have no experience of the blood of Christ. They marvel greatly at the preparations made for salvation. A sudden insight this is into the amazing glory of the Gospel. All heaven is ablaze with the excitement of redemption. But heaven is helpless in preaching the Gospel. Ministering angels may guard little children, may preside and sing as a heavenly host at the incarnation, may rejoice greatly over sinners who repent. But not even wondering angels can preach Christ. They do not know by experience the saving power of His blood.

The spectacle of wondering angels who cannot preach emphasizes the spectacle of the redeemed Church of God that wonders much, and cannot but preach. Men who know salvation for themselves are inevitable preachers of the saving Gospel of Christ. "Knowing that ye were redeemed."

When the Church is filled with wonder, when it is lost in amazement over the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus Christ to glory, it will preach, and its preaching will be evangelistic. The imperative need of the Church's ministry to-day is not learning or power, but a wondering mind, a faith that is full of amazement at the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.

It was a wondering mind that characterized the

first believers. We feel it in the pages of *The Acts*, one of the most eloquent documents ever written. Something there is that lies between the lines. An ineffable strength and buoyancy are there. It has been called apostolic wonder. It made these fishermen, tax-gatherers and others from the common walks of life, "a transfigured band whom the world could not tame." They were alive with expectation. Prisoners they might be in persecuting times. But they were prisoners of hope. They preached simply and unlearnedly in the beginning, but there was a stroke and swing of power in their utterances. Men felt a strange sense of exaltation in the preaching of the first Christians. They knew more than they could speak. The events of the Gospel were near and fresh to them. As one of them wrote, "we were eye-witnesses of his majesty."

So these first believers, with all their limitations, took the world by storm. Lost themselves in wonder, love, and praise, they brought to an unbelieving world the contagion of an unyielding enthusiasm for Christ and His Gospel. They created a veritable excitement of salvation, they amazed men by the preaching of the cross, they communicated to dead and dying souls a stupendous and living hope by the resurrection. And there was no dullness, no apathy, no dearth of confidence, no failure of expectation. Like a modern disciple of the cross they "expected great things and attempted great things." It is at one

moment pathetic, as we look at the spectacle of these little Christian churches planting themselves like mere specks of light around the Mediterranean. In the next moment it is glorious, as we witness their unbounding enthusiasm and amazement at the foot of the cross, and their tremendous achievements in the name of Jesus Christ. The Church is always little among world powers. But faith and wonder can make it king.

The preacher of the amazing Gospel of Christ requires more and more the schooling of his own heart in the wonders of grace. This makes him irresistibly an evangelist. Mazzini, wise statesman, being asked what study he would like to add to the curriculum of youth, replied quickly, "Astronomy." Youth, he said, needs to be taught to wonder. It is not a problem of youth alone, it is also a problem of middle years, and of life declining. It is not a question of education merely, but of literature and religion as well. It is not a question for persons only, but for institutions too. It is not an ideal of poets alone, who sing of how—

*"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky."*

It is equally a conviction of practical men who realize what the loss of wonder does to numb the soul, and check the romance of great accomplishment. Well does Chesterton say, "The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of

wonder." When the vision passes, and the rapture fades out of the inner life, the people perish. Heaviness, dullness, lack-lustre reign. *Nil admirari*—nothing to wonder at! Then the exhilaration of surprise departs. Masterful emotions cease to tug at the soul. Routine lays hold upon life. Adventure and enterprise lag. Spiritual fatigue, stagnation, disillusion, come in.

And this state of lost wonder may come upon the Church of Jesus Christ. It may come to the Church's ministry. The times when the Church and its teachers do not live fully in the wonders of grace are sad days. The Church seems to lack radiance, it is too like to common ground. The garment of wonder has faded. It handles the subject of religion with a casual mind. Men talk of it too much in terms of dollars and cents, organizations and societies. As one has said, the Church seems busy organizing rather than agonizing. If one were commenting upon the modern Church, it is to be feared that he would say, great activity is upon it. He would scarcely think to say that great grace is upon it.

The Church's coldness, apathy, indifference, lack of concern for salvation often distress its true friends. It is passing strange, the anomaly of all anomalies in the spiritual world, to have a cold Christian pulpit and an icy pew, with the warmth and wonder of the cross of Christ so near. These are constructive, creative days in the history of

the world. Ought they not to be so in the history of the Church? But the Church halts and hesitates, stands in awe of the world, seems to forget the great wonders of grace that it commands. It is less alert, less eager, less buoyant. It does not expect much. It lives in routine, it is wrapped in ceremony, it is rich in outward grace, scant in inward power.

There is a fear that rises often in hearts that love the Church, that the Gospel grows old to the Church. Its newness and amazement do not flash as they ought. When sacred things grow common the times are heavy for men. Imponderable mystery, things ineffable and full of glory, pall upon their minds. They suffer from loss of wonder. It is not lack of eloquence that hinders Zion, it is lack of wonder.

How rarely in these vast days of change, with the spiritual opportunities of an old world expiring and a new world being born—how rarely is the Church lifted off its feet by powerful emotions of revival. Where is the New Testament stir about salvation? Why are God's people not on tiptoe with expectation and hope of revival? Has the old concern and passion for souls gone from us to stay? Are miracles of conversion, belief and regeneration no longer possible? Are the ancient forces of God in the Gospel of His Son encamped outside the gates of the sanctuary?

It is a time for great faith and wonder in the

Church. It is a time for the Church's preachers, like wondering angels, to stoop down and peer into the amazing content of the Gospel. Blessed be God that we can preach. Unlike angels we know redemption. With deep concern and consuming eagerness let men preach to their fellowmen. With the experience of grace in his heart, how can a preacher of Christ be dull or unreal?

Emerson described a sermon to which he had listened. Outside it was snowing. All was full of wonder there, touched with surprise, instinct with amazement, alert with reality. Inside dullness, lack-lustre, unreality. There was no wonder in the preacher's heart. The amazement of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord was not there.

Broadly speaking this is what we mean by evangelistic preaching. It is preaching that shines with a never fading light. It is preaching of wondering minds conscious of a genuine experience of grace. It is preaching that has no sound of dullness, nor any jaded and stagnant measure. It is preaching that is alive with desire and downright concern. It is preaching that lives in the presence of stupendous spiritual facts and echoes great spiritual themes. It is a good day in the Church when the spirit of wonder comes into pulpit and pew.

"Except ye become as little children." We have tried to be learned, eloquent, theological, and the waters have not been moved. Meantime the old glory of the Gospel awaits us. It has never de-

parted. Miracles of the Spirit are near at hand, new movements of grace and the Spirit that are bringing many sons to glory.

The old apostolic wonder and optimism will come back to a glowing pulpit and an awakened Church. Though the vision tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay. Where believers cherish the amazement of the cross revival cannot be adjourned. When Pentecost was in the world, men said of the new preachers of Christ, "They are filled with new wine." But the apostle Peter replied, "They are the wondering disciples of a saving Gospel."

IV

WHAT MAKES A SERMON EVANGELISTIC

IT is not unlikely that the title of this book will meet with doubt in the minds of many ministers. Not a few indeed may give it a flat denial. Every minister his own evangelist is not the way the Church has thought of evangelism.

Let us try to imagine the average pastor getting ready to preach an evangelistic sermon. He will have said to himself, "I have been preaching sermons of the usual kinds for some time past; the coming Sunday I shall preach an evangelistic sermon." Or he will have in mind a distinction which he has long accepted between the morning and evening sermons. The former is the stated or formal sermon. The latter, as he says, is "more evangelistic."

For an evangelistic sermon he is likely to choose a text that is direct, fervent, and personal. Probably he does not write it at all, and when he comes to deliver it his manner is free and informal. He will have what used to be called "liberty" in the pulpit. The material of the sermon will contain a background of Scripture, but its leading characteristic will be its narrative and illustrative style. Incidents, examples, stories of life, will have a

large place, and these are made the means of enforcing the teaching of Scripture. They become also the basis of an appeal to emotion and the power of decision. Such sermons have long been useful in the Church. They are readily understood and easily carried in memory. But why sermons of this kind should be so widely accepted as the main evangelistic type is not clear. Useful as they are, they do not exhaust the field of evangelistic preaching. The value of illustrations in presenting the Gospel is beyond all doubt. Most preachers do not illustrate enough. A single apt and telling illustration will often lighten the way for hearers who find listening difficult and application tardy. Illustrations are valuable even with the keenest minds in clinching truth.

But the temptations of this kind of preaching, however much it taxes the mind in skill and penetration, are plain enough. Unless the preacher guard himself with rigid care, he will overload such evangelistic sermons with incidents, illustrations and stories of life. To some extent he may lose the advantage of Scriptural depth, and will tend to run in shallow waters. The actual evangelistic content of such sermons is likely to be small except with men of unusual power. It is the thin edge of the Gospel that they use, rather than its wide and deep measure. They will have atmosphere, and that is often persuasive, but atmosphere too easily evaporates. Yet it is a part of the art of preaching

that deserves cultivation. Those who can do this with ability as well as propriety should be slow to repress their gift.

But the fact is that most ministers cannot preach evangelistic sermons of this kind effectively and they ought not to try. Evangelistic preaching of this kind will be either distinctive and wonderful, or it will be a flat failure. Happy is the man who realizes that it is likely to be the latter. In some hands mere story-crowded sermons are paltry enough.

There is another class of ministers moreover who say—"If this is what you mean by making a sermon evangelistic, count me out. I not only cannot do it, but I do not want to do it. I have a different idea as to what preaching is. I am not a revivalist; my way is quiet and unemotional. I do not know how to ask people to raise their hands or come forward. I do not believe in evangelism. It means excitement, and I want people to think."

The feeling that they are out of character in evangelistic preaching shared by many ministers plainly originates in a narrow conception of what constitutes evangelism in a sermon. The particular type of which we have just spoken is the illustrative, narrative kind, dealing mainly with life and its experiences. It proceeds mainly by exhortation. Fortunately there are other types.

There is the teaching form of evangelism, where the force of the sermon rests mainly upon fact, his-

tory, information, the persuasive effect of things as they are. There is the personal type, where the appeal of the sermon is to realities and needs that are all too apparent in personality and life. There is the scriptural type, where the power of the sermon is that of a text or passage of the Bible made vital and intense in the experience of the soul, deep answering unto deep. There is the doctrinal type where the influence of the sermon consists for the most part of the explanation and enforcement of Christian teachings. The truth is that any one of these channels, and others beside, can carry the evangelistic current. A familiar example is Jonathan Edwards who was no evangelist whatsoever in the accepted use of the term. Yet he preached Christian doctrine so powerfully in his day as to make his sermons notable examples of evangelistic influence. Revival followed his preaching as an inevitable result. Many a minister would find if he tried that his own way of preaching can be made evangelistic. Does he preach historical sermons? He can do it in such a way as to move the soul in the direction of God. Is he a doctrinal preacher? He can so preach doctrine as to clarify the issues of life, especially the main issue of sin. Is he biographical, literary, scientific, hortatory? He can put a spiritual appeal into each of these forms. Does he handle skillfully science, current events, ethics, patriotism? There is always an opportunity to preach Christ.

One may preach nature sermons and have at the same time an exceptional opportunity to show concern for the soul and its relation to God and the cross of Christ. The kingdoms of nature and grace are not far apart. The divine care flourishes everywhere. The Master Himself left us a beautiful example of evangelistic preaching through nature. Behold the birds of the heaven and consider the lilies of the field, He said. What care God lavishes upon them. But your souls are of much greater value than these. If He clothe the grass of the field with beauty and the creatures of the air with grace, shall He not much more make spiritual provision for men? Not the law only, but nature also, is a schoolmaster leading us to Christ.

It is the tone, spirit, motive, interpretation, that make the sermon evangelistic. It is the touch of Christ that makes all things new in preaching. If the man is evangelistic his sermons will be evangelistic. If preaching is to him a shining, wonderful thing, if he handles the Gospel as one handles a jewel, a treasure that he has found, if he touches souls and everything with which they have to do with genuine respect, concern and love, how can he keep from making his sermons evangelistic?

Every minister is his own evangelist. Until we think this out for ourselves we have still a distance to go into the unsearchable riches of Christ. Methods or no methods, many meetings or few, extraordinary preaching or just the usual quiet

kind, emotional appeal or logical reasoning together, instructing the mind and comforting the heart, or asking people to do things, being able to do one's work in one way or in another—evangelism is not shut out from any of these ways of the ministry.

A minister's personal feeling and application of the Gospel make his sermons what they are. He is himself a stronger sermon than any he can preach. Whether he preaches technical evangelistic sermons or not, his own life is an evangelistic sermon. His way of living is a demonstration of Christ's power to save. It is not a syllogism, not an argument, that is needed, said Phillips Brooks, but a man. Evangelism begins in our own chastened and dedicated personalities. We have known men who could say, "Come to Jesus," with such personal force behind the utterance as to make the single sentence an evangelistic sermon. To let come "the Holy Spirit's holy errand through us," this is the way of an evangelistic ministry. By faith and prayer it is open to all.

It is a mistake to measure the evangelistic quality of sermons wholly by their revival power. Revivals will come, they should come. The Church is not a static body. The renewal of life in the Church is commonly traceable to sermons, but revival does not exhaust the meaning of evangelism. There are evangelistic results of sermons that do not show in the form of revival. Much wise and

intimate preaching on prayer may create a state in the Church that is not recognized as revival, but which is a definite reflection of evangelistic power. The minister's own practice of prayer will have much to do with the evangelistic force of his sermons. If his sermon is bathed in prayer in the making of it, if he rises from his knees to go to the pulpit, a power goes with the sermon that opens the way to the hearts of men. Prayer as a background to preaching is a condition that we can little understand, and certainly not measure. Men of power in prayer cannot preach a sermon, no matter what the subject, without making it evangelistic.

So also the preacher's passion for souls communicates itself to others and creates an evangelistic atmosphere. Persons breathing this atmosphere partake of this spirit. Little by little it grows and still others are touched by it. We have heard it said that certain pulpits had a soul-winning aspect. The ministers occupying them are forces for redemption. They might almost stand voiceless in their pulpits and still spread about them a contagion of salvation. There is an element of mystery after all as to what makes a sermon evangelistic. But we suspect that at bottom it is the mystery of godliness, the glowing and radiant effect of a consecrated personality.

There are ministers who never consciously preach evangelistic sermons, they themselves be-

ing judges. To them it seems that they are but carrying on a plain, even ministry in the Gospel. They do not strive or cry aloud. Yet the Spirit of God makes use of certain qualities in them and their preaching to give their ministry evangelistic power. We have known men who were not regarded as especially spiritual who nevertheless held evangelistic sway with their sermons. There are many evangelists among us who do not know themselves. Latent forces exist that have never been tried. The Spirit often claims these forces before they are laid consciously on the altar. "The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Let a man hesitate to say that he cannot make his sermons evangelistic. The Spirit knows and owns many ways. One whose ministry has a true background of prayer and the Holy Spirit is an evangelist whether he will or no.


The stroke of power in a sermon makes it evangelistic. Again the mystery. The manufacture of power is never entirely clear. In preaching we see that it is partly a matter of straight aim and directness. A minister who had been invited to take part in a series of evangelistic meetings came away to say—"I never knew before what it is to preach directly." It is freely admitted that some preaching is of a scattering kind. It has no clear aim. It may accomplish a great deal, and give much

pleasure and profit. But it lacks in grip. It does not achieve the stroke of power.

Go on preaching in your own vein, in accordance with your gifts and tastes. One cannot lift himself into a new set of abilities. But one thing he can do by faith—he can seek the stroke of power. More than likely it will come somehow from the cross of Christ, which is God's stroke of power unto salvation.

V

THE WORLD OF THE UNCONVERTED

T is common to think of the world of the unconverted as an alien world. They are not interested in the Gospel. If not hostile to it, they are at least cold and far away. Points of religious contact, if they exist at all, are all too few. How true this is of the present age is sadly confessed. All the more do we need to be reminded that it is not the whole truth.

The view taken by the Scripture of the world of the unconverted is that it looks hopefully, however unbelievingly, to Christ. It has a dormant religiousness that is touched by His cross. It has a kind of spirituality of its own that is inarticulate and pathetic. It has even a reluctant and backward faith that cannot be wholly buried out of sight.

In a very notable passage in the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 8: 19) the apostle Paul uses an impressive phrase—"For the *earnest expectation* of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." This is the English rendering of a single word, one of those vascular words of the Greek language that bleed when they are cut. Lit-

erally it means—*lifting or stretching up the head untiringly to look and watch*. This is the picture. In the paraphrase of Dr. James Denney it means, “absorbed, persistent expectation, waiting as it were with uplifted head.” A score of sermons lie in the background of this sentence.

There is a painting in one of the galleries of New York that commands attention. The canvas shows a young woman who is plainly expecting something or somebody. With fine and delicate skill the artist succeeded in painting an emotion of the soul. It breathes from the canvas. The pose of the figure, the lift of the head, the light on the face, all contribute to this impression. Almost we expect to see her reach out her hands to touch the object of her hope. It is the mood of earnest expectation. And the apostle Paul declares that this is the mood of creation. Even inarticulate nature that is involved in man’s sin looks up and grows expectant. But especially the world of unconverted men is stirred to earnest expectation by the Gospel of Christ.

It is a startling thought, and one that is calculated to inspire the Church and its ministers to new endeavours to win men to Christ. It is a changed conception from that which thinks of the world of the unconverted as an alien world. Creation is waiting on tiptoe and watching eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. Creation sighs for redemption. Throughout all the realm of na-

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ture the news of salvation has spread. All the world is stirred by the excitement of the cross. The unregenerate world, the world of the unconverted, the world lying in sin, is nevertheless interested in the conversion and salvation of souls. In the shadows of the world's careless, unbelieving life, there are souls without number that are waiting to be spiritually born. There is a sigh of creation toward God. The consciousness of God lies deep in the human soul. Eternity is in the heart of every man.

Certain spiritual facts illuminate and enforce the apostle's teaching about the world of the unconverted. Discouraged as we may be by the hard resistance of the world to Christ and His Gospel, we are also many times surprised at the promptness with which men turn to Christ. It must be that they are waiting close at hand. They are near to the Kingdom. They have a natural religiousness. Christ touches them and makes all things new. Dead things come to life by His life-giving power. Nathaniel Hawthorne tells in one of his tales of an old professor who brewed in his laboratory a strange elixir. When some drops of it fell upon a stunted plant, life came again. Every minister is his own evangelist to tell men of the elixir of the Gospel and to bring to his ministry surprises of grace. All men are at times religious. The image of God is not effaced.

The reaction of the mind from materialism and

atheism is another spiritual fact of the world of the unconverted. Underneath such bold denials the earnest expectation of creation still waits. Tides of feeling sweep in from the great ocean upon the hardness of men's minds. In these hours unbelieving men know of that—

“presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.”

Very impressive too is the confession that often wells up out of empty hearts that with the expiring of faith in God “the universe has lost its soul of loveliness.” As Alfred Noyes says of the atheist, “despite himself, he worships God.”

Religion has more friends than it seems to have. It is not a mere burst of optimism to say this. There is much unconscious faith—faith in the making. Some in our generation have lost faith through the birth pangs of new experiences. With others faith has become a steadier flame. At least the sense of spiritual need has grown keener. Men often seem to be giving up faith, when in reality they are seeking a firmer footing. There is a spiritual content of life which an increasing number of scientists are disposed to admit. “We know too much about matter to be materialists,” says A. J. Balfour. It is not a vain hope that science may yet help to revive religion in the world. The resources of God are charged with many surprises.

Man's extremity may again prove to be God's opportunity. "God renews His ancient rapture."

An astounding number of leaders have in recent years given the world the benefit of their feelings. They are not avowed believers, yet they confess to the real spiritual needs of their lives. They say that they cannot live without God. Many of them plainly feel the need of something akin to atonement, and they do not hesitate to say that prayer is a help to them. They may have drifted away from the Church, yet they have a craving for religion. As one of them said, a desire for a faith that he could hold fast to himself and pass on to his sons. An influential trade journal of late has been calling for a revival of "old-fashioned prayer-meeting religion." Another business paper, which stands for religious motives in the affairs of life, asks critically:

"Meanwhile what is happening to our churches? They are going to seed. The whole church industry lacks pep and imagination. And yet the Church is the only organization in existence for generating right motives in man. But that organization is asleep, and other agencies which develop hate, jealousy, and fear are running rampant."

Not seldom does it appear that the unbelieving world knows in its heart that the way of faith is the better way. Faith makes a completer and more normal life. Unbelief is not constructive, it does not build up the hopes of life. Significant

also is the fact that, while sin has tremendous power and allurement among men, its nature is well known. There is nothing to which unconverted men more promptly respond than to the frank statements of the Bible about sin. That "the wages of sin is death" is known and believed by men in general. There is no comfort in sinful living. It is impressive, although pitiful, to see what high stakes men of the world will often play upon their few remaining grains of faith. They will not let them go. In fact they cannot let them go. They cling, for example, to certain influences of their early lives that still touch them on their religious side. They do not belong to the Church, but they support it. They feel the spell of their mother's faith. They often read *her* Bible. Now and then, if not regularly, they kneel at night and speak their childhood prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Not infrequently it happens that some wind of God blows upon them—a strange Providence, a startling insight into life's meaning, a soul-shattering sorrow, like the death of a little child—and such men who belong to the unconverted world stand naked and alone, crying out in the night for God.

All this and more is valid comment on the teaching of the New Testament that "the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." These inarticulate longings for God, these reluctant efforts at faith, these

broken lights of goodness in human nature—with what strength of appeal do they speak to the Church of Jesus Christ. His ministers must preach with knowledge of the fact that the unconverted world after all is not entirely an alien world. It is lifting up its head untiringly to look and watch. This alone is enough to make the preaching of a sincere man of God evangelistic.

Nor is this all. The painful restlessness of the world must somehow be explained. Some lives there are that flow easily and smoothly on to the ocean. Such as these seem by nature and circumstance to be the sons of God. There are others that are all storm and stress, all agony. Nothing comes easily to them. Life is all awry. It has no charm, no loveliness. It is so easy for these to fall away, to drift, to lose God. Existence is a problem, not a joy. The sighing of hearts like these for God is sometimes like Jesus' cry—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Their earnest expectation is turned into bitterness. Yet it is there. They are still sons of God waiting for their revealing. The least articulation of their agony into faith might lead them to say—"O God, thou hast made me for thyself, and my soul is restless until it rests in thee."

It is the story of Jacob of the Old Testament, the man whom God met and wrestled with at the ford of Jabbok. And the reality of the experience so grew upon him there in his loneliness that he

cried out to God, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." There are many who are like Jacob. They are in the night of their unbelief, yet they hold on to God. They will not let Him go.

It was to such a world that Jesus Christ came—a hard, unbelieving world, a world that was already prepared to reject Him. It is the same world still. But now as then it is a world that needs Him, wants Him. Prophets spoke of Him as the Desire of the people. They did not know Him then: they do not know Him now. Dumbly they lift up their heads and look out into the darkness of the world. That loneliness of unconverted men, that pathos of souls that cry out of unsounded depths, how poignant this is. The world rejects Him but still desires Him. Many of us have seen this in human hearts—this longing beneath sin and unbelief. In his early ministry the writer knew a man like this. From a godly home he had gone out to live wholly in the world. Yet the old flame of desire burned on in his heart. He spoke still the language of faith. He had many of the habits and tastes of a Christian. He could not let God go. He would not give Christ up.


In the days of His rejection then and now the Saviour of the world knows about men—knows that the world is lifting up its head and waiting for redemption. In the days of His flesh He was never weary—He is not weary now. The Church must share the Master's patience and persever-

ance. Preachers of the Gospel must share His feeling. We cannot cease preaching. There are sons and daughters of God who are waiting for their revealing. Is it strange that the Holy Spirit is in the world searching for souls in the dark?

In the Senate of the United States there was laughter when a senator said, "When I speak of Christianity of course I know that you do not believe in it any more except in a churchly way." Is there any truth in this? Can it be that our belief in Christ is a mere institutional belief? Do we not know Him as the world's Saviour? The Church cannot rest while the unbelieving world is lifting up its head in sad unbelief. Somewhere under every ministry there is a soul that is lifting up its head in the dark. Does the Church share Christ's confidence in the cross? "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

VI

PRAYER THAT RUNS DEEP

HE subject about which the Christian Church should know the most seems at times the subject about which it knows the least. The hymn-writer who wrote of the Church as "praying yet a thousand years the same" told the truth. It may be too true. A thousand years of praying "the same" is a phase of the Church's life that invites earnest inquiry. At least the request of the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray," is as pertinent as it was in the days when Christianity was beginning.

No part of the Christian life is in greater danger of being lost in the helplessness and bondage of mere custom than the prayer life. It is easily smothered by long usage. To think of prayer rightly is to think of a spiritual instrument of great power, yet of exceeding sensitiveness. A maker of lenses for telescopes astonished a group of his friends one day by describing to them the long and careful process of grinding lenses. "One day," he said, "some visitors came into our factory. We had just finished the lenses for a large telescope. One of the visitors carelessly touched one of the lenses with her gloved hand. It took us three

months to remove the marks." Prayer is like this, it is to be handled with delicate touch.

The great bane of prayer, both private and public, is superficiality. Merely to "say" one's prayers is the poorest way to pray. When it suggests the running of machinery something is wrong. All of us know how our prayers tend to become laborious, vainly repetitious, incoherent. They meander like a sluggish stream in a tangled meadow. They seem to lack purpose and aim. They have no freedom, no joy, no moving spirit. Prayer is more than words. It is leaning upon the One whose life and power are

"The fountain light of all our day,
The Master-light of all our seeing."

Yet it is not a mere mystical condition, whence the soul looks out helplessly and incoherently upon the world, anxious but unempowered. On the contrary it arms one with inspiration and courage for action. Prayer is the rightful "poising of the soul between vision and task." It is the foe to dullness and inaction, to folded hands and spiritual indolence. He who prays must also work. It is in prayer that we come face to face with our own highest ideals, confront anew the standards of the life in Christ, realize the limitation of the carnal and the freedom of the spiritual life, and gain new and transforming familiarity with those thoughts of God and man—

“Which always find us young
And always keep us so.”

Prayer renews the life and earnestness of the Church, maintains the youth and energy of faith.¹ Not formal, drowsy, aimless prayer, but prayer that runs deep. The part of the Church's life that should be fresh and vigorous, full of creative energy, can never be allowed to shrink into helpless formality. In the Scripture prayer and power are closely associated. “Tarry ye . . . until ye be clothed with power from on high.” We more than suspect that, when the Church fails, it is not for lack of either interest or activity, but because of laggard prayer. In our best and most understanding hours we know that the times when the Lord is teaching the Church to pray are its creative and wonder-working times.

A young minister said—“There is no use wasting time on the prayer-meeting. The people won't come. I have given mine up.” He said it sadly and resignedly. This is more than a symptom. It may be a cause. An older minister spoke otherwise. “Knowing what I know from experience, I would, if I were starting all over again, fight the battle of the weekly prayer-meeting to a finish. By the grace of God I would never give up.” The fact that ministers are divided on this subject can-

¹ Some sentences are reproduced here from the author's devotional book, *Study to Be Quiet*, chapter on “The Quiet of Prayer.”

not be regarded with a quiet mind. Happily there are still many pastors who succeed in making the prayer-meeting what it should be, a generator of power.

Prayer is cumulative in its effect. God does not pay all His wages on Saturday nights. They pile up in His storehouse. Praying ministers and churches—praying twos and threes—are our hope of revival. The Church is most certainly the Church of the living God when it practises “the patience of unanswered prayer.” Much the best work of a minister is done in the deepening of the prayer life of the Church. It means invariably more interest in religion. It is less obvious than other things, but more real and abiding. Revival trembles on the lips of God’s people when they are learning to pray.

Many of the worries of pastors have to do with Christians who will not work. The task of the vineyard is great but they stand idle all the day long. But there are more who will not pray, at least they are not ready to pay the cost of prayer. For prayer costs just as love does, and faith and service. One must give himself to God when he truly prays. For those whose prayers do not run deep the concern of the minister will be even greater than for those who do not work. Prayer is very vital, very imperative.

A strategic thing for a minister to do is to teach his people to pray. But would all of us know

what to say if a group of people should come and say, "Minister, teach us to pray"? Many no doubt would be wise enough to answer, "Let us learn to pray by praying." So he would take a few of them apart and pray with them. An act like this is often the dawning of a new day in the Church. When believers—even a little group—begin to explore the resources of prayer, almost immediately they touch hidden springs of power. The wonder of it will seem to them like a miracle.

The minister himself is the key. More than all others he will need to have the Master's teaching in prayer. Prayer is even more necessary than study. The creative hours of a minister's life are when his study is also an oratory. We hear much about powerful preaching. This is well. But what about powerful praying? "Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, the third thing, necessary to a minister." Edward Payson said this. A writer on prayer finely says, "Prayer makes the man: prayer makes the preacher: prayer makes the pastor." God can use a man whose prayers run deep in ways not dreamed of. So the careful minister will take pains with his public prayers. For this he will be wise to use much study. Also much prayer, putting prayer behind prayer. The nearness of God, the saving presence of Christ, the flow of the Spirit's power, will crowd upon him. The needs of all souls, especially the souls that are his own, will be upon his heart. The language of

the Scripture will rise to his lips. New and fresh forms and phrases will come to utterance. One will hear the echoes of depths not fully explored. Often it shall seem to the people, as their minister prays, that the winds of God are sweeping over them, touching harps that lie hidden in their own souls. Unconverted souls too feel the invisible force and wonder. Some may begin to believe. When the people go away, they will carry with them more than the sermon. They will have as their possession the memory of some moments spent with God.

The minister's public prayers are not all. He must needs be deeply taught in private prayer. This will be the hidden secret of his ministry. He will not proclaim it from the housetops. But any who are close to him will know how he lives in his closet, and rises thence to his throne in the pulpit. It will be a boundless comfort to him personally. It will put a light in his face, and a mysterious touch in his hand. Fortunate will he be too if there are officers of his church who are willing to pay the cost of prayer. If the Church needs strong men in the closet and study and pulpit, it also needs bands of officers whose hearts God has touched. Official boards praying with their minister and being willing to continue in prayer will more than likely bring revival in the Church.

Prayer is the greatest spiritual power that believing men can wield. Withal it is so quiet, so

deep, so penetrative, that barriers cannot be set up against it. One can run away from sermons. From prayer it is difficult to escape. A praying church is an evangelistic church. It has unsought revivals, quickenings that are little understood of men. In such a church individuals will be discovered and lifted to new levels. Unexpected springs will be opened up. Two or three will be gathered together, and their hearts will grow warm. Revival is first an individual experience.

Some years ago a quickening came unexpectedly into one of our American colleges. There had been no unusual preaching, no set plans for revival, no multiplying of meetings and agencies. Nevertheless unusual attention was apparent. The air of carelessness was broken. The casual attitude which many assume toward religion at ordinary times was changing. There was an unusual hush in the chapel exercises. In a short time inquirers began to appear. Unconcerned persons were seeking the way. Without knowledge or plan a revival had come. It was not until weeks afterwards that the secret was known. A small group of students—not more than three or four at times—had been meeting after study hours to pray. That was all. But it was enough. Prayer is qualitative, not quantitative. It is cumulative in its force. It sifts like fine flour into hidden crevices of life.

There are some things that are too great for

definition. It is so with prayer. It is something to be felt, experienced. The New Testament speaks of *praying in the Holy Spirit* and we suspect that this is the nearest it comes to telling us what prayer that runs deep truly is. When we rest consciously in prayer on the Holy Spirit, our praying *is* spiritual of necessity. Nor can it be casual, shallow, or merely general. Neither is it aimless. Its aims too are spiritual having to do directly with the kingdom. Thus prayer is redeemed from sluggishness, listlessness and wide meanderings. It has destination, passion, power. It becomes joyous and confident, like "leaping from rock up to rock." This is something of what it means to pray in the Holy Spirit.

There is conscious help too from the Holy Spirit when prayer runs deep. We feel that our infirmities are helped, our minds are fixed strongly on worthy spiritual objects. We have given to us the spirit of grace and supplication. "We know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Instead of vagueness and wandering there come commanding clearness and intensity in prayer. Spiritual objects of prayer stand out and invite importunity. "Ask whatsoever ye will." Prayer in the Spirit takes on unusual urgency, even violence, as when Luther stormed heaven in behalf of his sick friend and helper Melanchthon. Men of violence, our Lord

said, take the kingdom of heaven by force. Are the prayers of the Church—are the prayers of ministers—too light, lacking in importunity and urgency? Is our weakness at this point? Have we not drawn boldly and strongly enough upon divine resources?

With thoughts such as these about prayer the minister may turn again in faith to his dying prayer-meeting and say to his own soul, "We will here together, many or few, explore the resources of prayer, and store up the help of prayer for the Church and the world. We will learn to pray by praying. We will practise quietly the projecting force of prayer. We will find out anew the quiet restfulness of prayer. We will achieve if we can its releasing strength, its quality of setting men free from incumbrance. We will try to let our prayers run deep, praying in the Holy Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance, waiting upon God."

VII

THE EXPERIENCE OF POWER

LOVE, sacrifice, faith, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, hope—upon such structural ideas the Bible builds. These are the architectural principles of the spiritual house. To this list is to be added also the idea of Power. The conception of religion as it is set forth in the Christian revelation is that it comes from love and power and issues in the same. The Christian religion is far more than a theory of life, it is a power for life and destiny. It flows from the Rock of Ages. God so loved the world.

Power is constantly associated with the Gospel. Christ's life, teaching and example are stated in terms of power. His crucifixion and resurrection are stupendous results of divine power. Christ Himself is spoken of as the power of God. The Gospel is the power of God. The word of the cross is the power of God. The power of God is manifest in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. So too the Holy Spirit is the divine agent of power, whose working is manifest in faith, repentance, conversion and regeneration of men. The idea of power runs through the whole con-

ception of the Christian life. Godly living stores up power, releases it too. The resources of the Christian life, while varied and rich in their content, are never without the pulse of power. Prayer is a well of power. Grace and power are associate terms in the New Testament. The Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The word of God is living and active, that is, powerful, energetic, efficacious. Testimony and preaching are the sending forth of spiritual power in the Gospel.

Out of all this there grows a very lively conception of the Church of God and its ministry. It is the plain business of the Church to dispense the power of God among men in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit and prayer are the intimate and gracious instrumentalities by which this can be accomplished. The Christian Church is not static, it is dynamic. It is not formal, it is spiritual. In the Church the prevailing thought is that of the Master—"The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." Daily the Church shall be vindicating itself by the life-giving words that it speaks to the world. Because of this conception of the Church as dispensing power, the Church is incurably evangelistic. The Christian ministry is essentially an evangelistic ministry, proclaiming among men the power of God unto salvation. When ministers realize this, whether at the beginning, or in the blossom-time of their service,

or even in the autumn of their days, there will be victories of sword and flail.

In the beginning the Church needed the experience of power. So Pentecost came at the threshold. There was no long postponement, no great tarrying. It was not necessary to wait for maturity. Believers might talk endlessly about power. But what they needed was an actual beginning, made manifest in their own experience, of the circulation of power. This is a perpetual lesson. It is one thing to talk about power. It is another thing to have the experience of power. It is quite possible that the Church is given overmuch to talking about power. This must be done and that for the sake of gaining power. An organization should be stationed at this point or that on the wall. There is weakness here or there. Tactics of defense are needed. Devise something all the time for the sake of power. The ministry too. It shall have power. Many tactics and ways for this. Early training, intensive education, language, travel, reading, eloquence, personality, a variety of gifts and graces. All this is well. But it is needful that ministers go deeper and look higher. It is the experience of power that they need more and more. The grace of God as an experience of their own, the saving power of Jesus Christ on the cross and His rising from the tomb as an experience, the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit as an experience, the rich revealing of prayer as an experience

—in terms like these we have to state the service of the Church of God to the world. The experience of power enlivens the testimony, makes the word living and active.

Ambassador Page out of his wide experience with nations wrote thoughtfully of “using the great power lying idle about the world.” He was thinking of nations, especially with certain practical alignments, as dispensers of power. Men still dream and will continue to dream of employing the idle forces of peace lying about the world through international alliance. And the Church, how rich are its resources in spiritual power. Yet there is probably no place in the world where there is so much unused power as the Church. If the Church could be brought to employ its unused power, no one can say what bountiful results of grace would come.

Ministers of the Christian religion are truly in places of power. The dynamics of grace are all about them. The power of salvation is at their hand. The living hope of the resurrection is near. They have their treasure in earthen vessels, but this is so in order that “the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God.” It is theirs by the preaching of “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” to assure men that they may bear about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in the body.

It is in itself the beginning of power for a min-

ister to have this understanding of his ministry. He thinks of it in terms of power. He knows that he is close to the sources of power. He realizes that the divine purpose in the foolishness of preaching has to do with power, even so great an end as the salvation of them that believe. Then he grows more and more ambitious for his ministry. It shall not be content with surface results. Its reach shall exceed its grasp. Not only thoughts that lie too deep for tears, but spiritual forces that underlie all possible language and expression, with love and faith that make the word living and active, shall enrich his ministry.

The high faith that a minister has about his work, his vast concern and aspiration, is the beginning of the experience of power.

With so much said in the Scripture about power, is it not strange that power is frequently absent from the Church and its ministry? A vacant factory often displays the sign, "To let with or without power." What if the truth-telling Master should write upon His Church, and upon the pulpit of the Church "without power"? "Holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof."

Sheer and strong reliance upon the Holy Spirit is the way of the experience of power. There is much talking of this in the churches. But not a wide enjoyment of the privilege. Looking at the very heart of things, we come here upon a great need of

the modern Church. The story of the early Church and its Pentecost is seldom read in the Church to this day without a thrill. Ministers love to recite the story. The people love to hear it. It is a reminder at least of the strange and convincing origins of the Christian faith. The touch of something mysterious, mystical, profound, engages the soul. Few sentences of the Scripture are pronounced with greater assurance than this—"Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." Yet there is also something distant about this, something that lies beyond the realm of the Christian life to-day. Our experience of power in the Holy Spirit is laggard and late. But it is always present in the Church, and wheresoever it is found, there also is the way of power. One touches many things in the Church, and especially many pulpits in the Church, and feels a satisfying shock of power. Nothing is said, but one knows instinctively how it is. There is a sweet and strong reliance upon the promise, and the power comes. It is the way of power, and those spirits in the Church, in or out of the ministry, who are content to cultivate such quiet and real dependence upon the Spirit, are the truest representatives of the evangelistic mission of the Church.

Of prayer that runs deep we have already spoken. The Holy Spirit and prayer are indissolubly bound up with power in all the Church's history, beginning in The Acts. The disciples prayed

and the place was shaken where they were gathered together and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The experience of power is in these composite terms, prayer and the Spirit. Then—"they spake the word of God with boldness." Every true friend of the Christian Church knows that it must have an increase of spiritual power for such a time as this. The way of the increase is through the Holy Spirit and prayer. What if we say that the physical tokens of power in The Acts, such as the sound of a rushing wind, the tongues of fire, the shaking of the place of prayer, are to be repeated in spiritual form to-day? As to prayer it would mean that prayer still has residing in it power to shake the Church, and to make the world tremble. More and more experience of the shattering, disintegrating power of prayer, the power to open doors, remove mountains by faith, to win victories over enemies, to defeat principalities and powers—more of the experience of the power of prayer will introduce the new Acts of the Apostles in the Church to-day. The Church is mild and unbelieving in prayer. Power loiters on the way.

The experience of power in preaching is quite within the reach of one who relies strongly upon the Holy Spirit and prayer. Our trouble is that we do not key our preaching to power. It is gentle, consoling, useful, and all this is well. But there must come many times in the life of God's ministers when they key their ministry by the

Holy Spirit and prayer to the terms of power. At such times they take hold of the handles of power. They project the Gospel in the face of opposition as God's power. They preach Christ as the power of God unto salvation. They proclaim the word of the cross and the resurrection as the word of power. They leave all the shallows of preaching behind and launch out into the deep. When the mood of power is upon them they look for miracles of grace. They expect that men will be converted, that sins will be forgiven, that souls will be won to God in the Saviour's love and sacrifice.

It is happily true also that "the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" in preaching does not require striving or crying. It is altogether consonant with the quiet, prayerful, continuous ministry of pastors watching year in and year out over their flocks. The resources of the Church of Jesus Christ are so great. Unsearchable riches of Christ. Love that passes knowledge. Faith that moves mountains. Pardon that is abundant. Comfort that is deeper than words. Joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Victory that overcomes the world and death itself. One may even whisper of these things, by the Holy Spirit and prayer, and there will be power. Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit!

VIII

THE LOST WORD



CHRISTIANITY," said the old minister one day, "has a lost word." He left the matter without explanation, and left his hearers to do their own thinking. It has been observed that the old minister is inclined now and then to be sententious. He will start a thing going and trust to your having wit enough to find out the truth for yourself. It is whimsical, but it is his way. Probably he feels that to put a finger sharply upon a sore place is sufficient to start a thrill of recovery. He subscribes no doubt to the dictum, "The anatomy of error is the first step in its cure." It is quite possible too that the old minister represents, somewhat critically, the attitude of the past toward the new generation.

What if Christianity has a lost word—is this a serious matter? Is it not a tendency of institutions and systems of thought to overlay themselves with language? What South described as "the fatal imposture and force of words" is not to be overlooked. Yet the investment of Christianity in language is very heavy, albeit the number of really great words of the Christian vocabulary is not

large. A half dozen or more are depended upon to carry the Gospel over as by a bridge to our understanding and conscience. But they are words of weight and power, thorough words, charged with deep discernment. They marshal thought, help to build a kingdom in the heart of man. We must speak true and strong words about the Gospel. Weak language leads to weak thinking and believing. It is one purpose of the Bible to furnish men with a rich and vital vocabulary, the main words of which are to be jealously guarded and diligently studied. If it should come to pass that one of these interpretative, constructive words were severely marred, it would go ill with the Gospel.

It is the word that Christianity speaks about sin that is endangered—*Repentance*. It is a vital word indeed and its relation to the history of souls, to regeneration, conversion and salvation, is not to be doubted. Yet it has fallen from the place of prominence it once held in Christian thinking. At best the emphasis laid upon it by ministers in bringing souls to God is light. It is not spoken of forcefully in the churches. The witness of the Church to repentance is weakened.

The causes are not far to seek, and it is well for every minister to state the case clearly to himself for the sake of his ministry. In our time the attempt is openly made to reason repentance away. It is mainly, they say, a psychological affair. No one looks back with regret upon a time now past

when penitence was often associated with exaggeration and unreality, and the joys of a new-born faith were often lost in morbidness and depression. Abnormal states of mind, obsessions, complexes, neuroses, to use the new terms of psychology, are not what is meant by repentance. The subject of sorrow for sin is treated in the Scripture with soberness and sanity. We are compelled, by contrast, to say that the handling of the subject by the new psychology is at least inadequate. Exaggeration and misdirection of feeling cannot dispense with genuine and healthy sorrow for sin. Nor can the Church be relieved by these new explanations of repentance from its concern about the passing of sorrow. The question is an insistent one for preachers of the Gospel—Do men truly repent?

The confusion of mind between emotionalism and emotion is a further reason why the emphasis of repentance has been weakened. The Church has become afraid of emotionalism. It does not desire that men shall be carried into the kingdom by mere gusts of feeling, fictitious emotions of the heart. For this reason a ban is put on evangelism in some quarters. On the other hand religion has something to do—much in fact—with emotion. Preachers of the Gospel are easily mistaken at this point. They are afraid of religious excitement, and on this account they repress genuine emotion, curb legitimate feeling. They modify their preaching,

weaken the passion of it. They do not press home the full Gospel with fervency and power. It is not the business of the Church to encourage unnatural feelings, or to produce spurious emotions in the interest of religion. But it is the business of the Church and its ministry to promote religion by wise dealing with genuine and creative emotions of the soul. It was the fault of the false prophets in Israel's day that they protested against excited emotionalism on the subject of popular sin. But the true prophets still insist that a genuine emotion of repentance for sin was Israel's due to God. It is futile to say, Peace, Peace, denying the hurt of the people, when there is no peace.

It is plain moreover that repentance fares ill when the real issue of religion is not distinctly raised. This is common among the people of every age. There are always many whose thoughts about religion merely skim the surface. The subject does not rest hard upon their personal life. The deeper aspects of religion scarcely come to them. Not a few of the doubters belong to this class of surface thinkers on the great subject of religion. Persons who thus move in religious shallows are not likely to give themselves much concern about so vital a subject as repentance. They will know the blessing and joy of religion, and much of its obligation too, but their approach to God is not marked by the solemnity and seriousness of sin that must be repented of.

It is truly a very serious thing if the Church does not bring the real issue of religion into the clear open. This is one of the most beguiling of all the temptations that come to a minister—the temptation to dwell too much upon the lighter aspects of religion. It is not the minister's temptation alone, it is the temptation of the age. Religion must be made less serious, less remote, less unearthly. To meet the age in which we live it must become more "practical." Its social aspects must be developed. Its world implications must be met. It is impossible to say that these things are not true. They are true. But always there is an underlying truth. The actual issue of religion is personal. What has a man done with his own sin? Who has taken it up for him and upon what terms? It is clear at this point that the Church for lack of thoroughgoing treatment of the actual issue of religion, may be itself responsible for the waning of repentance. It is not unfair to say that the kind of preaching that handles mainly the lighter things of religion is not promotive of the spirit of penitence.

The cause that operates most insidiously against the free and healthy play of repentance in the soul is the lack of the sense of sin. Probably the most serious spiritual change that has come to pass in many generations is the fading out of the clear realization of sin. Men know it, but they do not feel it. The call to repent falls upon hearts that

are dulled to sin. They have no sharp and clear understanding of its nature. Lowered conceptions of what it actually is have worn the emotions of men down to mere casual feelings of regret. Sorrow has gone away. After all, why must the soul repent? The gripping sense of sin has let go. Sin is a much milder thing than was supposed. Mistake, misfortune—not guilt. Failure to come up to a proper human standard, not a falling short of the glory of God. Something that can be condoned by love and sympathy, not something that has to be forgiven by a righteous God. With a fading sense of sin, it is not strange that the experiences men have of repentance in their approach to God are vague and uncertain. The world is scarcely apologetic about sin. The Church at times is all too complacent about it.

The effect of the fading sense of sin is seen in its most serious light when men look at the cross of Christ and are not moved by any deep emotion. It is not sin alone, but the lowered sense of sin, that holds Christ from the sight of men. Sin of one kind begets sin of another. Men regard the atonement with cold and distant feelings. Calvary does not warm their hearts. No great emotion respecting sin comes to them under the shadow of the cross. Christ has died in vain. The act of those who have fallen away from the emotions of the cross, and are not renewed again unto repentance, is called with the utmost frankness in the Scripture

an act of "crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh and putting him to an open shame."

One who saw John Newton toward the end of his days when the mind and tongue of the old preacher were in decline, heard him nevertheless speak impressive words. "My memory is nearly gone," he murmured, "but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour." It was Pauline intensity, as when he spoke of himself as chief among sinners and solely a product of the grace of God. Such intensity as that of Paul and John Newton we hardly expect to find to-day. Yet the cross has not lost its power. The Holy Spirit still has wonders to perform.

Even so brief an analysis is sufficient to show how great a task belongs to the Church and its ministry to-day. Almost the world is virgin soil. It is not fatigued with too much feeling. It is not worn out with excess of emotion. The Gospel is still good news. Who shall say but that a daring and winsome presentation of the crucified Christ will renew the pangs of sin, and sharpen the call to repentance? The opportunity of the Church to-day to bring about revival in the world is almost unparalleled. The world is a valley full of bones and they are very dry. "Son of man, can these bones live?" And when the answer was fully come, the breath came into the dry bones and they lived. Oh, for a strong breath of this same wind of God to make the world live.


Strong, fearless, scriptural preaching about sin—its reality, its effects, its ramifications—the Church owes this to the world, owes it to Christ who died for men's sins on Calvary. No hiding of the deeper aspects of religion, no glossing over of the actual issue with lighter things. Let us face the facts for ourselves. Let us require the world to face the facts. Sin is here in human life, the guilt of it, the ruin of it. Preach about it tenderly, sympathetically, but honestly too and fairly, even sternly. Forget "the bleak psychological climate which is unfavourable to the tender plant of Christianity." Go straight to the facts. Sin is no dilettante affair. Speak the sheer imperative of John and the Lord Himself—*Repent!* Is it not strange that Holy Scripture should speak of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth? The angels close to the throne know the justice of it, the thoroughness of it. Those who by common consent are called great preachers of the Gospel are usually found to be dealing faithfully with sin.

The last word is Christ. He is Omega as well as Alpha. The cross is in the field. Lead men to the cross for belief, repentance, conversion, salvation. It is strange how this one event—the crucifixion of the Lord of glory—works the cure. This only can do it. Nothing is so thorough as the cross. Where sin abounds, grace abounds more exceedingly. Men are more than conquerors through Him that loved them. The Christian victory is like

that, it is a super-victory, a victory all through man's nature, even to the uttermost of his life and destiny. Preach the imperative Christ, the complete Christ, the able Saviour. No stammering, no fear, no hesitancy about sin, with Christ at our side. "When I preached philosophy," said one, "men applauded. When I preached Christ, men repented." The apostle Paul faced a hard impenitent world, determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

IX

CHILDREN OF THE UNEXPECTED

T had been a hard month in the old minister's pastorate. Things had gone wrong. There were few visible fruits. A state of dullness had fallen upon the church. It was a time when a mind so inclined easily sums up the discouragements of life. Something occurred—the old minister never knew what—to check this tendency with him. Toward the middle of the week there came a change, and he had several happy mornings in his study. Sunday morning he stood up in his pulpit and announced with a ring in his voice the subject of his sermon—"Children of the Unexpected." He took as his text the words of Elijah's servant in 1 Kings 18: 43. "There is nothing." He recited in a few words the picturesque story of the servant's discouraged report and then dwelt upon his surprise when, after many journeys to the mountain, there came a cloud "as small as a man's hand." This is God's way, he said, of rewarding us unexpectedly. It is a wonder that He does so, our faith is often so meagre. In this case Elijah's great faith was in the background.

Then he took a roving commission in the Bible,

and called up the memory of other notable examples of the unexpected. He told the strange, almost forgotten story of Eldad and Medad in the book of Numbers, illustrating how the Spirit of God rests in surprising places and upon unexpected people. We can never tell where the seed of the Kingdom may fall. Then to the New Testament, and the Lord's own ministry. How Jesus delighted to surprise His disciples, as with the miraculous draught of fishes, after the disciples had toiled all night and taken nothing. He dwelt particularly upon the amazement of Peter and the others, and upon the Master's words, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The sermon reached its climax in what was said about the unexpected results of Christian work in apostolic times. No wonder that the early Christians were thrilled over and over again. The entire book of Acts is a rebuke to our little faith. The disciples gave their testimony with power and great grace was upon them. The results were more than they expected. God likes to go beyond, to surprise us, the old minister said, with the unexpected. The last thing Philip expected was that he would go out in the desert and find a man riding in his chariot, reading one of the most spiritual portions of the Old Testament. The old minister closed his sermon reciting briefly the heart-stirring narrative of how revival broke out in Antioch. It was all so unexpected. No one in Jerusalem looked for

such a thing. Imagine the gladness of Barnabas, and of Saul of Tarsus, whom Barnabas brought to Antioch. The disciples were called Christians there and then, and the old minister suggested that they were worthy to be called Children of the Unexpected. He closed with such a glow in his own heart, that he thought some one would be converted immediately. But there was no response. Weeks afterwards a stranger called, an old man, a veteran of the Civil War, and when he said, "I am a child of the unexpected," the old minister knew that he had heard. "I was dedicated to God as a child by godly parents," the old man said, "and have carried the memory of it all my life. At last the Spirit of God has found me. I want to come among God's people in the Church."

Probably any minister who would undertake to write his autobiography could add his own chapter on the children of the unexpected. How many whom he had not counted upon came to his call. It was a mere bit of a sermon, just a sentence or a word, that was carried in mind for years, until at last it did its work by the power of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of a soul. There should be much greater faith among ministers in the power of preaching. The people are careless and inattentive. The minister wonders whether anybody really got the point in the sermon last Sunday. Months, years afterwards, he may find out. We forget that the influence of the Spirit is deeply enlisted in

preserving and using the word of God. This is probably what the Scotch mean in their proverb —“ We do not come to church to bury sermons.” Truly they seem to be buried out of sight, but let the preacher assure himself that there will be a resurrection in some soul. What a simple sermon may do in a man’s memory in the course of years is entirely beyond the measure of its apparent power. The circumstances of its delivery will be quite negligible. It will be in a country church, or a mission hall, on the street corner of a city, without the support of fine music or eloquence. Nevertheless the Spirit of God does not permit the sermon to be buried.

These incidental, almost accidental, effects of preaching should tend to quicken the minister’s faith in his work. What he does will seem to him many times futile and ineffective. At all times his work will seem entirely inadequate. He should constantly remind himself that bread cast upon the waters will return again though it be after many days. We may well believe that the Divine Spirit is constantly at work preserving the bread and keeping the seed alive. A man in a half drunken state was heard reciting texts of Scripture and portions of sermons that he had heard years before. It was pathetic to realize how poorly he had profited by what he had heard. Yet it taught impressively the lesson of the penetrative power of the preached word.

This is particularly true of children. They disappoint us by their inattention. But they also surprise us by their impressibleness. In childhood the mind is "wax to receive and marble to retain." The early years are therefore the most hopeful years for the evangelism of the Church. The minister's word, the teacher's reminder, however lightly they are received, are likely to survive. It is an hour long to be remembered when the least promising, the most restless, of all your little group in the family pew, comes to you as a father or a mother and says—"Our minister said so and so one day a long time ago, and I have been thinking ever since." It is the *open sesame* to the promised land of the child's heart. Go in and possess the land.

The Spirit of God works when and where He will. If He touched the hearts of Eldad and Medad in the camp, away from the tabernacle, and led them to prophesy, you may be sure that He will continue His outside ministry. This is one reason why the Church must multiply its agencies, and why the minister will vary and broaden his appeal so as to include the farthest soul. One can never tell where the open door will be found. Sorrow may have come and left a sensitive soul. And that soul is before the minister as he preaches. So the minister, if he be a true evangelist, will drop "handfuls of purpose." He will not be thinking alone, even in his ordinary ministrations, of those who are safe in the fold. He will remem-

ber in the midst of his sermon—it scarcely matters what the topic—those who are out of the way, those whose hearts are hungry and yet who know not that the manna is on the ground, those who have strange, incoherent longings that lie out of sight in the heart. Children of the unexpected are often found in this way. They are ready to be found if only some one, the minister or other worker, will reach out in the dark and touch them.

One minister treasures the memory of an incident that surprised and encouraged him in his first years. He had scarcely begun to find himself. He was uneasy about everything out of the ordinary in his work. He was doing the best he could in a series of special meetings that were being held, without much visible encouragement. One evening the silence that ensued after a call for testimony was suddenly broken by a man who arose and said, “I feel the Spirit of God in my heart. I know that He is speaking to me. I want to come to Christ.” He was known in the community as an unbeliever. He had not been in church for years, until now, when he had slipped in about the middle of the service. Afterwards he told the pastor that, while he had not been in church, he had been reading the Bible. The community long remembered the coming of this child of the unexpected. The Spirit works when and where He will.

Yet if we knew the whole truth, we should no doubt find out that the work of the Spirit is usu-

ally prepared for by human agents. Some evangelist of the way has dropped a word, or done a good deed, or in some way given a call to the soul. It was not the pastor, nor any person of prominence in the Church. It was an obscure believer, backward in speech. And the Spirit took his broken words and made them like arrows in the soul.

Children of the unexpected are always about us, in every service of the Church, in clubs, business associations, social occasions. The apostle Paul found them even in Cæsar's household.

The romance of finding a new soul in the dark and leading him into the full light of the Gospel is scarcely equalled by any other experience. To-day it may be a child or a youth learning the ways of life. To-morrow it will be one midway in the journey, or one far along toward the sun's going down. Think of it—winning a soul, leading a human spirit up the stairway to God. No work is more rewarding. And when the work is heavy, and the disappointments many, there are still the children of the unexpected.

There is no dullness in the ministry of soul winning. Monotony, the weary round of burden bearing, the care of churches, the exhausting contact with people, the criticisms, the lack of appreciation, all this is forgotten when sons and daughters are coming to glory. The excitement of the cross—how endless it is.

X

THE BIBLE AND REVIVAL



CHRISTIANITY is a religion of a book. What Christians do with the Bible—how they relate it to the drama of history, and still more, how they bring it into the personal life of men—determines in large part the influence of the Christian religion. As to the Bible itself, its place and power among men are a perpetual astonishment. It is often criticized, and by many is disbelieved. But few indeed are they who are able to contemplate contentedly its disappearance from among men.

The Church is rich beyond measure in the possession of such a book. One might be supposed to think that with the Bible in its hands the Church cannot die. But history reminds us that the Church through neglect has many times in its life seemed to lose the quickening effect of the Bible, and, as a consequence, has suffered serious decline. It is always fair to ask what use the Church is making of the book? Is it using it to the best advantage for the revival and maintainance of religion among men?

The Bible has no talismanic power. It is not a book to be looked at and touched with the expect-

tation of benefit. It is a book to be read, heard and felt in the heart. "Give heed to reading." The simple reading of the Scripture publicly in the churches is an important and impressive part of a Christian service. The open Bible on the pulpit, with the minister reading while the people listen, is one of the moving spectacles of Christianity. Better still, put the Bible in the pews and let the people follow the reading.

An unforgettable example of evangelism through the public reading of Scripture is found in the book of Nehemiah. It was outdoor evangelism. The site was "the broad place that was before the water gate" of the restored Jerusalem. There "all the people gathered themselves together as one man." Ezra the scribe "stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose." And the people "spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book." And he read therein—read and read from early morning until midday. He did not preach: he read distinctly and gave the sense, causing the people to understand. Another notable example occurred in Puritan days in England, when crowds gathered in the nave of St. Paul's to listen to the reading of the first six Bibles set up there by Bishop Bonner for public reading. John Porter, "a fresh young man and of a big stature," was the Ezra of that time, "and great multitudes would resort thither to hear him, because he could read well and had an audible voice."

It is unfortunately true however that the public reading of the Bible in the churches is almost the least effective part of the service. The minister who learns how to do it well will exercise evangelistic power even in the reading of the Bible. He will not allow himself to be careless or casual. He will make abundant and prayerful preparation. It will be sufficient usually to read without note or comment. Or again he will "give the sense" as Ezra did. There are ministers whose ministry in the mere reading of the Bible is a means of revival. A peculiar feeling of grace comes upon the people. An atmosphere of holiness and power surrounds them. On the occasions when the reading is from such parts of the Bible as contain "strong, exacting, masculine pages," the worshippers will be lifted up. They will feel how inadequate are the "thin, superficial books of religious sentiment," and how strong and masterful the Bible is. They will be buoyed up with courage and girded anew with faith.

The public reading of the Scripture belongs to that liberal education of the people in biblical language, thought and atmosphere that the Church must be prepared to furnish. It is a misfortune that the Church as a whole gives so little heed to reading. We cannot doubt that it would soon have revival on its hands if it made more careful preparation for the hearing of the testimony. To make the people eager to hear, to quicken their appetite

for the word, is one of the neglected strategies of pastoral evangelism. If there be a minister who feels himself unfitted for evangelistic effort, let him begin here. The Church has not begun to make full use of contact of the Bible with the people through reading. It is more than probable that there will in the future be found ministers and congregations who will arrange to read the Scripture. On such occasions they will think less of preaching and will simply read. Whole books will be read and the sense will be given briefly. The meaning will grow upon the listeners. They will feel the cumulative effect of the reading. It will come to them with massive and moving force. Words that are spirit and life will stay in memory and go with them on their journey. At special times, like Christmas and Easter, such consecutive reading of appropriate portions will create surprise. The people will linger quietly over the sacred story of Christ. It will seem almost new to them. This is something to be desired, for to many the Bible is old. Is the Church giving the people a fair chance to hear the book?

The Bible is a quickener of souls. It possesses authority and the imperative of power. It is a book of spiritual prerogative. There is about it an insistence that is not easily put aside. It is a hard book to defend one's self against. It is a book that finds the soul. It stirs the deep things within us. It is often remarked how people turn

back to the Bible, especially in times of need and crisis. Men may neglect it, but they cannot dispense with it. Emerson wrote in his journal—"This old Bible, if you pitch it out of the window with a fork, bounce it comes back again."

Wise leaders of the Church will do their utmost to secure heed to private reading. The Bible is to be meditated upon quietly, and received privately in memory and understanding, as well as heard in public reading. One of the things that hinders revival is that many in the churches neglect the Scripture. It is not close to them, a fire in their bones. In the days when the early translations of the Scripture into English were being made, the coming of the Genevan version was charged with extraordinary importance. This was a household edition. Formerly the people heard the Scripture read in public. Now they might read it in their own homes. To-day Bibles are everywhere. But what troubles us to-day is that the people are not reading it. There is wide neglect of reading by Christians themselves. If we could have a widespread return to the book by the people, this would be equivalent to revival. It has been said that "God soon fades out of the life of a man who does not pray." It may also be said that God is likely to seem distant to the man who does not read the Bible.

There is appalling ignorance of the Bible in the churches. If American congregations are fortunate

enough to have the Bibles in the pews, much rustling of leaves is required to find the place. A pastor once spoke of the people helping their ministers, adding that every congregation needed many Aarons and Hurs for the battle. When many asked about it he knew that the interesting story of the staying up of hands was not widely known among his people.

In some congregations the custom of enrolling the people annually for Bible reading is followed. They do not make a pledge, but they declare it to be their intention to carry on daily reading of the Bible in one form or another. The day of the enrollment is made important in the eyes of the people, the minister preaching an earnest and enthusiastic sermon about the Bible. In these congregations there is an air of vitality that is easily felt. It is traceable to the habitual cultivation of the people in the Bible. A Bible-reading people is already a revived people. They live in an atmosphere of refreshing. A new era of knowledge of the Bible is imperative in the Church.

Besides public and private reading, much use of the Bible in classes and groups in the congregation, with well-directed study among the youth in the Sunday School and the societies, will help to saturate the minds of the people with biblical thinking. When the expected revival comes one of the instruments of grace will be the prayer-meeting. Wise ministers will keep this troubled

ship going steadily in biblical waters. Every minister should hold himself responsible for the training of the people in the Word of God. Prayer and the Bible, with the Holy Spirit, are our hope of revival.

The supreme art of the Christian Church is preaching. For this ministers are raised up, trained, and spiritually ordained. The material of preaching is ready to hand in the Bible. That preaching has continued with unabated interest for so many centuries is due to the fact that men are religious in their nature. It is also due to the vast and rich resources of the Bible. No other book can compare with it in power of public appeal. The minister's own heart will first be warmed by it. His mind will be saturated by much reading and study. He will hide it in his heart, so that it will well up from within and bring refreshment to the people. The Bible is the minister's lifelong companion. Better than most men he knows its felicity and attraction, its honey in the rock, its high elevations, its divine soundings in the heart of man. He will read it for himself, as well as for the people, until in the course of the years he becomes a man of the book. With such skill as grows in the soil of love he will use it to teach, to correct, and to build up in righteousness. It is a full book and many streams flow out from it, bringing comfort and praise to men.

The Church has many needs to-day, and none

greater than for preachers of the Word. It is impossible to run a thousand preachers in one mould. There are many preachers and many ways of preaching. But one thing is expected of them all—preach the Word! There are permutations and varieties enough to furnish approach to every man. Let it only be remembered that preaching the Word is the highest definition of preaching that we know.

It is a sore trouble in the Church that there is so much preaching that cannot by the utmost generosity be classed as preaching of the Word. It is not the sword of the Spirit, but some poor weapon of our own. It does not spread the knowledge of the Word. It leaves the heart still in need of bread. To fritter one's time away in the pulpit on indifferent themes, with the rich full book of God at hand, is more sad even than it is futile. As in the days of the prophet Amos there is a famine in the land, "Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah." If this famine be also in our pulpits, woe betide our times.

Are we preaching the preaching that God bids us for such a time as this? Do our hands cleave to the sword of the Spirit? The Bible is a quickening book. For generations it has been the source and reason of revival, through prayer and the Holy Spirit. Historians, prophets, poets—all of them have life-giving power. The company of the

apostles, evangelists, teachers, revelators—all of them bring light. Through them we see God, and Christ crucified and risen, and feel the Holy Spirit of power. It is God's book and man's book. It wins men, brings them to repentance, converts them. It is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." What waste and tragedy of a minister's life to face a famished world with anything less than the Bread of Life, to meet a hostile world with anything less than the overturning Word.

Every minister who devotes his pulpit ardently to prayer and the preaching of the Word—is he not an evangelist of the promised revival?

XI

PREACHING CHRIST

THE Christian minister has one sermon to preach all through his ministry. A sermon is the seed of spiritual speech. And although the minister will preach from many texts and on many topics, running through all of them will be found his real sermon, the seed and sowing of his ministry. He has a harp with many strings. But there is one deep tune in all the music. Not what, but "*whom* we proclaim"! ✓

Young David the harpist played different kinds of tunes for Saul, the tune of the sheepfold, the tune of the little creatures, "the help-tune of our reapers," the funeral tune, the marriage chaunt, the altar chorus of the Levites, the tune of "the wild joys of living," the song of awakening. At length he sang the tune of the Godhead—"See the Christ stand"! There are many topics, but He is the Theme. He is all and in all. In Him all things consist.

The Old Testament is a book of preaching. It is very vital too. The prophets were preachers. The glory and will of Jehovah, law, ordinance, righteousness, providence, worship, prophecy and

promise, with many practical concerns of human life—these were their subjects. The prophets waxed eloquent upon them. One can imagine such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea and others, going among the people to preach. Much of their work was done out-of-doors. They stood at the gates of the city or on street corners. They wooed the hearts of the people with visions of righteousness. Now and again they rose to great heights with visions of a Coming One. They searched diligently into sacred things and testified beforehand “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them.” Evangelism is nothing new in the Church of God. It has an impressive background of prophetic preaching.

But the history of the Christian sermon is much more sublime. Its theme is a Person, and what He did for men. The Christian sermon alone, its vitality, its power, its fascination, is a convincing evidence of Christianity. Christian eloquence exceeds all other kinds. New riches of language, fresh forms of eloquence, high reaches of thought, were born with the Gospel. By all reason the art of Christian preaching should have expired long ago. Its theme should have worn away in the lapse of centuries. But the stream of spiritual utterance that started at Calvary is still running as fresh and beautiful to-day as it was on the Day of Pentecost. The world is indifferent enough, but we do not believe that it would be willing to dis-

pense with Christian sermons. Rightly used they are among the most moving influences known to men.

The first Christians gave immediate attention to preaching. They preached Christ, and the theme had no end. He was the inexhaustible Christ. The apostle Peter, whose sermon on Pentecost has sounded down the ages, explained in one of his letters the power of Christian preaching. "We were eye-witnesses," he said, "of his majesty." The apostle John in a memorable sentence declared that if the things that Jesus did "should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written."

Most fervent of all was the apostle Paul. Such energy and conviction this man gave to preaching Christ as to create perpetual astonishment among men. His words are in the ends of the earth. They are instinct with undying vitality. Portions of his writings are ecstatic, uplifting, convincing beyond conception. They start a fire in the heart that never burns out. "The image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation . . . that in all things he might have the preëminence" —with such transporting words he depicts the Person of Christ. The crown, the ecstasy, the rapture of all his ministry was in proclaiming Christ to the world. The wonder of it was never lost upon him. No dullness, no decrepitude, no stunted or

halting utterance, ever crept into his testimony. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ"! The eloquence of Paul was the eloquence of an amazed spirit.

There are many ways of preaching Christ. Everything that He touches glows in a new light. When the heart of the preacher is full of Christ, he will never lose sight of Him, no matter what may be his subject. If he preach about the law, it will be a schoolmaster to lead preacher and people to Christ. If he speak of history, literature, experience, he will find everywhere echoes of Christ. If his subject be sin, he cannot help preaching about Christ. It is the complete Christ whom the Christian sermon proclaims. He is all and in all. He runs the whole gamut of human life. He who finds Christ finds life and salvation. If we do not preach Christ, how shall men know the way?

A man in a congregation once asked his pastor what he would preach about if he had but one more sermon to preach. "I would preach Christ," was his prompt reply. "And what would you say about Him?" inquired the man. "I would say two things," he added. "I would say who He is and what He did, and I would use every minute of my time in laying this upon every heart." There would be different ways to do this. Preaching

Christ is not narrow and confined, it is broad. Least of all is it shallow, it has depth and power.

The name of the Saviour alone has power. There was a preacher of our time who spoke the name *Jesus* so lovingly, so tenderly, as to convert men. He made Him the imperative, the irresistible Christ, by his way of speaking His name. People felt Him knocking at the door. They saw Him passing through closed doors. If we can preach Christ in this way—the inescapable Christ—men will repent and come to God. Men have criticisms and excuses to make about religion. But few voices have ever been heard in question or objection against the Son of Man. In London a company of working-men hooted and hissed at the mention of prominent persons—statesmen, leaders of business, preachers. But when one of the speakers spoke the name of *Jesus*, every man's hat came off.

Sidney Lanier, our American poet, wrote eloquently about Him, calling Him "The Crystal."

"O all men's Comrade, Servant, King or Priest,—
What *if* or *yet*, what mole, what flaw, what lapse,
What least defect or shadow of defect,
What rumour, tattled by an enemy,
Of inference loose, what lack of grace
Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's,—
Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, good paragon, Thou Crystal Christ."

The preachers of Christ whom we meet and hear

in The Acts laid stress upon the name of the Saviour. They baptized in the name, healed in the name, magnified the name, bore the name before people and kings, preached boldly in the name, hazarded their lives in the name. Sometimes they seemed to capitalize it. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. They declared that there is no other name under heaven that is given among men, wherein we must be saved. So it has gone on sweeping down the centuries and across the world. The name of Jesus has not only made its way into history, but, as one has said, it has ploughed its way into history.

We need many names in order to preach Christ richly and with power. The light of a perfect jewel shines out through many facets. So with Christ. We approach Him along many lines. Our highest aspiration and desire find an answer in Him. Preaching the fact of Christ is one way to know Him. The few are interested in history and evidence. The many say, "I know Him whom I have believed." When the heart knows Him, no one can disprove Him. The sinless Christ is a rich theme for Christian preaching. To tell men that He is incomparable, "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners," is an open door to faith. To preach His full humanity, His inseparable association with men in the roots of their being, is a persuasive Gospel. That it behooved Him

in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He is not ashamed to call us brethren, these are the glorious facts that underlie the name He often used—The Son of Man.

This is the beginning, but it is not all. That He is our Friend, Companion, Elder Brother, only touches the hem of the garment of His Person. To preach Christ one must find the right name for Him, the full-orbed, inclusive name. When He was among His disciples, He tested them, "What think ye of Christ?" As if He would say, What is your name for Christ? Is it full enough, large enough? Does it cover the whole ground? Does it tell, not only who He is, but what He does? Son of Man goes part of the way, but it does not cover all the distance between God and man. It is not the name for sinners. The only name for sinners is the name that comes out of eternity, out of the bosom of the Father, and rings out over the whole of life—the Son of God. No wonder that the apostle Paul's heart glowed with the joy of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. To preach Christ is not merely to praise Him as a man. That could never avail for salvation. If one of us were preaching his last sermon, he could never content himself with less than His full, rich, saving name—Christ the Son of God the Saviour of Men.

If ever a man preached Christ, it was John the apostle. "These are written," said John, "that

ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing, ye may have life in his name." The preaching of Christ as Son of Man and Son of God is without fear or apology. It will be adequate, strong, covering all the distance between God and man. You do not need to explain Christ, or to defend Him, or to protect Him. Preach Christ! He is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

But the Christian preacher will never preach his strongest sermon until he takes his stand at the cross. Here he can use his most persuasive convictions, his noblest eloquence. Yet neither learning nor eloquence are required for this. Unlearned folk can tell the story of the cross. They only need to know by experience. It was so with the first preachers. Some of them were unlearned and ignorant men, yet when they preached, others "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." They knew pardon and cleansing of His blood; they proclaimed Him as the Friend and Saviour of sinners. If the Church forgets to tell men of atonement for sin through Jesus Christ who died on Calvary and arose again, it is shorn of its power. It has many beautiful things to say, but it lacks still the saving word without the cross. Preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Christian sermon need not always speak of Him by name, but it will always be within reach of the place where He died.

XII

EVANGELISTIC COMMUNIONS

EVERY time the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the church an incomparable evangelistic sermon is preached. The minister may decide not to preach a sermon. Nevertheless with the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup an eloquent and powerful appeal of the Gospel is made. As the communicants gather at the altar, or as the brethren appointed go down the aisles and stop at the pews with plate and cup, the unspoken text of the occasion is brought home to all hearts—"Jesus Christ and him crucified." No one who listens can miss it. The voice of the communion has travelled afar. "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." In every nation under the sun there have been found throughout the Christian centuries groups of souls who have observed the Master's word to do this in remembrance of Him. For many generations it has been the rallying point for seekers after God, the starting-place of human freedom and democracy, the inspiration to higher life and service.

It is impossible to imagine what this world would be without the communions that are constantly ob-

served in the churches. The loss of them would be an appalling, an immeasurable, disaster. Adapting Daniel Webster's famous speech in the United States Senate, when he referred impressively to England's drum-beat, we may speak of the communion in the churches, "whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of Christ."

No service of the church is to be more carefully prepared for than the communion. Due announcement is made some time in advance and the minister has it in mind in all his ministrations. The people are thinking on the subject. Reminders are given both public and private, and many are heard saying, "I expect to see you at the communion service." There are other times when one may be absent, but not on this day. Slowly through the years a strong and tender sentiment has been built up about it. Members postpone their visiting so as to be at home. Students who are near enough often return from college. Some who are in service of various kinds are released on that day. They made this provision when they engaged themselves.

Now is the time to quicken certain activities as if an important guest might be coming. Indeed such a Guest is expected, and there should be no lack of preparation, no failure of hospitality. He is not the Guest merely. He is the Host also, and upon His part "all things are now ready."

In many denominations of Christians a special Preparatory Service is held on one of the evenings of the week preceding the Lord's Supper. Some churches hold this service on Saturday afternoon. This is a convenience to members living in the country. But the automobile has made this almost unnecessary. The minister takes unusual pains with the Preparatory Service. It gives him an invaluable opportunity to deal with the central things of the Gospel, to unfold the meaning and obligations of the Christian life, and to explain the Lord's Supper and its place in the Church of Christ. There will often be some in the Preparatory Service who are thoughtful about beginning the Christian life, but are undecided. An earnest evangelistic call may bring them to a decision. We recall an example of this where a man and his wife came to the Preparatory Service thinking on the subject but with no definite purpose in their minds. An earnest Christian woman spoke to them at the end of the service, and led them to the room where new members were being received, to present them to the pastor and officers.

If a week or more of services can be held before the communion, the pastor has a rich opportunity to press the call of the Gospel, accompanying it with instruction and enforcing it with personal invitation and letter-writing. The period preceding the communion is the time for the pastor to hold the Communicants' Class. He will do well to

teach it himself, if possible, and thus come close to different groups of young people in the church in this important phase of their experience. He will have many things to say to them out of his experience, and they are likely to look back upon this association with the minister as having had much to do with shaping their Christian faith and life. In his dealing with people, old or young, who are taking the steps that ally one personally with Christ and His Church, the minister emphasizes two things—intelligent faith and sincere surrender.

The importance of the communion and its value in the Church are enlarged by the fact that in most of the churches it is customary to accept new members and give them a public place in the membership of the church at the communion table. Thus they associate their early vows with the Lord's Supper, and the central truths of the Gospel that are represented there. There are few Christians who do not look back with peculiar feelings of sacredness to their first communion in the church.

When the communion is actually at hand, the minister's touch upon the sacred event means much in recommending the Gospel to believers and others. The service will of course be simple and quiet, with a spiritual dignity and stateliness that will be engaging and comforting. There will be some who will not enter very deeply into the mystical benefits of the hour. Nevertheless they will be

strangely quieted and strengthened by the experience. The traditions and customs that have grown up about the Lord's Table, and that belong to this or that denomination, are important, and the pastor will not disregard them. What forms to observe, what Scripture to read, what hymns to sing, what arrangements of the table and the service to make—all should be understood and orderly. The communion is the most delicate and sensitive of all the services of the church. It is easily marred. Slight touches of thoughtlessness, brusqueness, or hardness of tone, may seem to some almost irreverent. The whole order, earnestness, spiritual concern and profound reverence of the communion will voice the evangel and draw forth the response of love and faith.

The custom of omitting a sermon at the communion is scarcely wise. Many desire a word spoken at this time and are waiting for it. The Lord's Supper may be made the occasion of memorable addresses, however brief, by the minister. The people are in a receptive mood, and the sympathetic address of their pastor at such a time will do their hearts good. Great passages of the Gospel will be used for the sacramental hour. Scenes and incidents of the life of Christ will come before the congregation. They will feel anew the attraction of His life, and most of all, the power of His death and resurrection. The shadow of the cross will fall across the table where are the broken

bread and the wine in the cup. The minister's voice will be suffused with the love of God in the Gospel of His Son. Tenderness, sympathy, desire, will speak in his tones. He will speak winsomely and will not eschew the wooing note. It is the communions more than anything else that keep the Church alive, and the evangel uppermost in the minds of men. It is an hour of deep renewal. It is an age-long confession of the Church's need of revival.

The minister and the people who set a high value upon the communions are pledged thereby to the work of evangelism. Theories, even theologies, may be narrow and inconclusive, but the passing of the bread at sacrament proclaims the breadth of the Gospel. Every Christian church is evangelistic at the Lord's Table. It is Christ's own household that is present, but the world for which He died is not far away. The communicants will enjoy no selfish comfort. They will wish to pass the sacramental bread and wine to others beyond.

In the life of "Ian Maclaren" it is related that he loved to find his way on holidays to little chapels and country churches. He enjoyed hearing the homely addresses of lay preachers. One day a farmer was preaching in a Methodist chapel where Watson often worshipped. At the conclusion of his sermon he said, "Why do I preach Sunday after Sunday? Because I cannot eat my

bread alone." Dr. Watson said later, "I count that one of the greatest conclusions to a sermon I have ever heard—he could not eat his bit of bread alone."

The Church of Jesus Christ cannot eat its bread alone. Therefore it is incurably evangelistic. It is committed by nature to the hope of revival, and the spread of salvation.

Some are present at every communion service who are not openly on the side of Christ. Probably they were brought up in the Church and Sunday School, and their personal sympathy is with the Church. But they are not planted in the house of the Lord. The Lord's Supper moves them. They cannot witness this quiet service, without realizing that there is a place at the table for each of them, it may be by birthright, which they have never taken. Others may be there who are total strangers to the Gospel. Their early training has given them few spiritual contacts. Some of these even will be touched by the communion. Its simple and mystical preaching of a great world event will fascinate them. The minister will surely be thinking of all such and will throw out some encouraging word even to those who feel themselves least worthy.

A woman past seventy came thus to a communion service some years ago in a city church. She had never confessed her faith in Christ. The service impressed her. For the first time in her

long life she felt a strong desire to claim her place at the Lord's Table. The pastor read it in her face. When he called on Monday he found her ready. She was at once received into the church. A person at seventy has little time to spare. In a few days she went abroad. During the summer there came a happy letter from Geneva, where she had just taken her first communion.

No doubt the impressions made by the Lord's Supper upon those outside of the Church are much deeper than we suppose. A vigilant minister may reap rich harvests *after* the communion as in the case just mentioned. One or more souls outside the recorded membership will be left in a tender mood. They will be saying to themselves, "I too should have a place at this table." The simplicity and quiet of the service will have impressed them. The appeal of Christ and His cross will have come to them with fresh power. The attractions of the Christian life will once more engage them. They will realize too that only in the Church can the privilege of the Lord's Supper be enjoyed.

The Church has a rich asset in its communions, a force of comfort and conviction that spreads silently and afar. That the Church has a table at the center of its life, where bread and wine may be had, is typical always of the persuasive hospitality of the Gospel. One thing the minister should never omit to say—"This table is not ours alone: it is yours also."

XIII

THE PROFESSOR'S LETTER

THE Church is very dear to a great multitude of people all over the world. It is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the Church of the Lord, which He purchased with His own blood. Yet there are many of its best friends who see that it has faults. They speak of these, not for the purpose of criticism, but with desire for the improvement of the Church. What troubles many of its devoted members is that the Church is consuming so much of its energy on secondary matters. These matters indeed are important, but they do not constitute the real mission and life of the Church. It would be well if ministers and church officers all over the land would sit down and inquire about the real mission of the Church. They would find room of course for many things, for the life of the Church is very broad. Its mission includes not a few different kinds of service. But they could not go to the end of the inquiry without realizing that the real mission of the Church is to save souls, and that its passion for doing this is at least lukewarm.

In this chapter we shall make use by permission

of several extracts from a significant letter written by a college professor, who is a devout church member and officer. His letter contained nothing of a faultfinding nature. Nor was it an emotional letter. Questions are brought up, however, as the extracts will show, that are in the minds of many to-day.

"All the week I have been trying to write something to you, but have been restrained by the double reason of lack of opportunity and of ability. Both seem equally hard to secure. A burden, or perhaps an uplifting, has been upon me, and I ask for your impressions on this subject."

There is a prophetic note in what is said about a burden. This was the way the Old Testament prophets felt. As this, "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see." Or this, "The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi." The feeling is correctly described too as an uplifting as well as a burden. "Perhaps an uplifting has been upon me," writes the professor. The distinction is between a mood of depression and a mood of longing and hopefulness. In all its times of need the Church has been blessed with prophetic hearts that were burdened and uplifted at the same time. They desire more spiritual life. They earnestly look for seasons of refreshing from the Lord. The burden is also an uplifting to them because they see so plainly what the Church has done and what it can still do.

And this is a sign of the times. There are many burdened souls in Zion, pressed down with sorrow for the world, and unhappy that Zion herself seems so little troubled. There is reason enough for this to make sensitive souls anxious. But it is good to be anxious in these ways. If many more were so showers of blessing would soon come down. The uplifting is upon many even now in many parts of the world. Let every minister encourage it with prayer and preaching. There is no need to fear the burden that people have, if only they have also an uplifting of faith and seeing. It is time to cultivate everywhere in the churches the expectation of revival. New movements of the Spirit of God are not far away. A few here and there who feel their hearts bowed down, yet also lifted up by the promises, are of a weight beyond their number. Wait for the vision. It will not tarry.

The professor tells us explicitly what it is that he feels about the Church of our times. Being a scientific man, he is accustomed to thinking his way through a subject.

“It is the spiritual welfare or attitude of our church. We are all busybodies with church work, but from my own points of contact it is largely a matter of doing chores. These are important, but they are merely the preparation, and ultimately should lead to visible spiritual accomplishments. Our church has a long history, but that is a source of weakness which should not overcome us. How can we continue to be a vital force in the community, when we

merely hold our own? Are the wheels kept moving merely for their own exercise, or can they have effect outside the mechanism? Are we resting contentedly on our oars? I am sure many activities in the church flourish as never before, but my own progress has not been visible to myself or to any one else."

If he seems to be pointing out weaknesses in a critical spirit, do not fail to notice that he is looking carefully at his own door-step. "My own progress has not been visible to myself or to any one else." This is the confession of one who finds something wrong with himself. A soul like this certainly has a real longing and it is one of the first signs of revival. Beyond all doubt there are at this moment many such in the Church. They are discontented and disappointed spiritually. They take their part, it may be, in the busy things of church activity, but they have aching hearts, a feeling that they are not growing up and out into a freer and finer air. These are the Church's aspiring spirits, seeking spiritual breath and life. Often they are underrated. They do not seem to be doing much. Certain "activities" do not invite them. They are steady going, always in the services. They have time for the prayer-meeting. They have a good word to say now and then in a meeting, or to another person. It would be said about them probably that they are not the people who make the church go. They have no plans. But they are the church's spiritual backbone. If

the church does not develop this type of member, it will die. It is they who have revival in their hands.

The usefulness of the other type of member is not to be underestimated. Their thought about the church is that it must be a *going* concern. Everything about the church shall be marked by activity. "This is an active church." One hears this said with pride, as if it were a thing unusual for a Christian church to be active. What it means is that everything is keyed up. Machinery is multiplied, and steam is always on. Scores of things are being done. There is always a committee holding a meeting, or some plan being discussed. If there is a season without a campaign of some kind to be promoted, it seems strange. The touch of efficiency is masterful. Experts are in the land. Movements are going forward. Programs are being "put over." The minister has grown masterful. More often every day he is spoken of as an expert—in organization, management, finance. Here and there are found "promoters" in the ministry. They strive and cry aloud. They write publicity with a capital. There is nothing personal or private left in religion. The new hallmark of the Church and its ministry is *up-to-date*. The modern thing to do is to "sell" the Church and the Gospel to the world.

This is admirable. It is full of promise. The Church is no longer cumbrous and slow. It is

quick, alert, business-like. It must be admitted that there is immense satisfaction in having church finance successfully covered by budgets that work like a successful machine. The new era of temporal success is to be welcomed, not criticized. We have all prayed for this in our time. We shall never return to the old days of scrimping along in the expenses of God's house. If the minister in the meantime has grown to be an "expert," is he not all the better? Does he not commend himself to practical men of affairs? The note of warning that comes down from apostolic days about forsaking the word of God and serving tables is hardly meant for our times. Success is unanswerable.

But the professor misses something. Others are like him. They feel that the Church needs something. It wants *that*, as a famous artist once said of a picture that was submitted to his judgment. Would it be fair to say that the Church is far along in its plans, but new, like an amateur, in spiritual achievement? There is a note of hardness about the modern busy Church that leaves it scarcely recognizable. Has efficiency crowded something out? It has banners and trumpets. But what of the still small voice? There is usefulness—yes, great usefulness—but we wonder about radiance. Has something fine and ineffable departed? Something mystical too? Is it this that is missed, something that cannot be counted?

Something that comes out of spiritual worship and praise, out of the atmosphere of high biblical preaching, out of the region of great communions, and the glorious companionship of converted souls?

It is not the modern efficient church alone that suffers this lack, it is any kind of church. Dearth of spiritual life and fruitfulness has been the arch enemy of the Church from the beginning. Always it brings about the same conditions, whether churches be busy or idle, emphasis of "works" as more clamorous than faith, stagnation in the spiritual and creative emotions of the soul, undetected losses in the fineness and constructive power of the Christian life. It must be that the root of the professor's burden and uplifting is here.

If we were inclined to object to anything that the professor says, it would be to what he says about being "busybodies with church work." "From my own points of contact," he adds, "it is largely a matter of doing chores." It would be necessary to remind him of the enthusiasm of a certain church member who felt that efficient door-keeping, although not especially spiritual, is a useful "chore" in the Lord's house. One would not like to see spiritual things run at too high pressure. Besides it is not possible to press all the worshippers into the same mould. We do not forget a certain Mattithiah in the Temple who had an "office of trust over the things that were baked in pans." The professor might be willing at least to

speak of the busy "activities" of the Church as "glorified chores."

But the professor is right in his feeling. Of this we are certain. His instincts lead him straight to the point. He is not deceived. If you ask what the professor wants, or what he misses, you may as well see it distinctly. He wants to be made sure about "the spiritual welfare or attitude of our church." He wishes to see that along with all the many activities there shall be "visible spiritual accomplishments." He wants to know that the Church is doing much more than keeping the wheels going round and round. What is the Church really doing for souls? How is it using its powers and opportunities? Is it achieving in the spiritual things for which it exists? Is its work at the center or mostly on the outside?

As to the two types in the Church, they need not be in opposition. The spiritual ones can also be active: the active ones can also be spiritual. The Church needs to be taken up more and more, not only with doing things, but also with thinking things through, consorting much with the Bible, and praying things out to the end. This way lies revival.

Before the professor closed his letter he gave an account of his attendance upon a meeting held in one of the denominations for the deepening of the spiritual life and the saving of souls. What he says about whispering may not be out of place.

"The church building was more than crowded. The purpose of the gathering,—and of others to follow,—was not so much to increase the membership, but to revive a sense of personal responsibility and consecration in the existing membership. I was much impressed with the service. There was no whispering in the audience, or in the rear of the room, but a tense realization of the spiritual life."


He then proposes in his own church that meetings for conference be held, not a mere get-together of the supper type, "and then deceive ourselves into thinking we have done something, but for the purpose of more definitely stating our fears, our hopes, our mission, our ideals."

As the professor came away from the service that he attended for the deepening of the spiritual life and the saving of souls he was not made to think of plans and programs. But one thing was true—"The call to one's knees was undisguised." He felt an abandon of the Church in prayer. A feeling comes over us that the Church can do almost anything it wills to do through the Spirit of God and prayer.

The great revival of 1857 began in this way, with one man who had a burden and an uplifting. The longing for spiritual life is a quick contagion. A strong believer, one whose desires are deep, sharpens the countenance of others at the Church's altars. Revivals are not mass experiences.

XIV

CHRISTIAN DARING

HE fourth chapter of The Acts is one to go back to many times. The new Christian apostles are meeting the first impact of the world, and we see what spirit and courage they had for it. As if by magic they have sprung into men of great strength.

A lame man had been healed at the door of the temple called Beautiful. As a result the two apostles, Peter and John, spent the night "in ward." The next morning they were brought before the rulers and elders and scribes. It was likely to be a difficult experience. The man who had been healed was there. "By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?" they asked. Peter took this as his text. The reading of his defense thrills one to this day. The apostle was lifted up, he suffered no hindrance, he was under no bondage. "Now when they beheld the *boldness* of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

What impressed the Jewish rulers was the outspokenness of these men. They were almost blunt

in their speech. If the high priest and his companions expected Peter and John to hesitate and stammer, they were much mistaken. The apostle Peter was absolutely fearless. He did not mince words. Not once did he show any timidity or lack of preparation. He was direct and positive. He had no apology to make. A note of authority pervaded his words. It was the same thing that they had observed in Jesus. "He spoke with authority and not as the scribes." Here were two men, unlearned and plebeian they evidently were, who struck out from the shoulder. Their speech was so forthright and clear, so unhesitating and compelling, that even the rulers marvelled at their "boldness." They saw that they had been with Jesus, and that they had His manner of clear and positive speech.

From the beginning Christianity has been imbued with a spirit of adventure. It has never been easy to be a preacher of the Gospel. One who undertakes it must be ready to cast away fear. The first preachers were timid enough, but they threw aside the bondage of timidity. They were outspoken. They preached without hesitation, without reserve or embarrassment. Fear left them and a spirit of adventure and daring possessed them. What was true then is true now, only a daring Church and a bold ministry can begin to overcome the world.

Many of us who are in the ministry have had to

learn the lesson of boldness by experience. Nature may have given us a shrinking disposition. The schools did not teach us boldness. We limped along for years in our ministry, with a fair record for speaking, but we were never bold about the Gospel. We realize as we look back that we did not come out strongly. Our speech was bound. We had restraint. We lacked adventure in speech. People around us, it may be, saw that we had scholarship, love, reverence, but no one marvelled at our boldness.

Much thought will always be given to this subject among ministers. The Church is not a suppliant among men. The Church's ministers do not come begging for a hearing. They come with a demand to be heard. A ring of authority is in their words. They know no fear, no hesitancy, no embarrassment, when they speak about Christ and His Gospel. A good friend of young ministers came to his pastor with a kindly suggestion. He began with a compliment, remembering that it is better to exhort than to command, to praise than to blame. "Young man," he said, "you are going to make a splendid preacher. But drop the apologetic tone. You have nothing to apologize for in preaching salvation." Thinking it over he discovered, what he had not realized before, that he lacked Christian daring in the Gospel. Why, he could hardly talk of sin in those first days without explaining it. In due time he learned to be out-

spoken when he talked to men about their sins. Something of this no doubt was in the words of the apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." He was not embarrassed or under restraint when he preached Christ as the power of God unto salvation. When he stood before his own Jewish world, when he faced a pagan mob, when he stood among the altars and temples of classic Greece and Rome, it mattered not, he was not afraid.

This sheer confidence of men in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a magnificent force among men. Often it sweeps men straight on and into the Kingdom. Christian daring answers a hundred questions. Courage in the ministry is a contagion felt by others. When men preach in this spirit of Christian daring and boldness, their preaching has a power of appeal that grips souls. You catch it in the way they use the Bible. You feel the strong word of truth coming to you as you listen to a sermon of this kind. Circumlocutions give way. Direct, positive ways of speech take their place. Plain, simple, straightforward utterance in the Gospel wins attention. Men feel the ribs and structure of the Gospel. Now and again the preacher who is bold and outspoken in these ways, makes irresistible use of his text. He thrusts it, as it were, before the mind, into the heart. He gives it imperative force with his hearers. They *must* hear, he will not let them close their ears. This is preaching at its best, in point of vitality

and moving power. We must know how to be bold in Christian utterance.

Barnabas reported how in Damascus Saul of Tarsus "had preached boldly in the name of Jesus." He did the same in Jerusalem. In Ephesus he preached boldly in the synagogue for three months. The same word—*free utterance*. He was not confined, not timid in the Gospel. He did not mince words. His speech ran like a stream in volume. Passages such as these led preachers of a generation or more ago to speak of having "liberty" in preaching. God give us liberty in preaching, untrammelled courage, "inventiveness of spirit."

Bold preaching means preaching the whole counsel of God. Not a fragmentary utterance, not a hesitant or backward Gospel. Bold preaching means that the preacher is not ashamed of the Gospel. He makes it aggressive. It is the power of God unto salvation. A bold preacher seeks to win men, to convert them, to lead them to repentance, to bring them to God in Christ. He preaches searchingly. He lets the light in. Bold preaching is deep—morally and spiritually deep. As deep as human need—as deep as sin. Bold preaching is high, as high as God's throne of judgment, as high as Christ's cross of mercy. Bold preaching is outspoken and clear on all the subjects of grace—forgiveness, justification, regeneration, assurance, sanctification, glory.

Bold planning, too, for salvation. Many of our churches need broadening of their plans. They are not gauged to salvation. This is one reason the churches are not evangelistic in temper. If they had more boldness in the Gospel they would do more for men's souls. Evangelism looks difficult to them. They are not sure about revival. It would be out of the ordinary. It would stir things up. Let well enough alone. *Status quo* is safer than adventure in untried paths. Thus fatal measures of littleness rule. Complacency cuts deep. "How busy we are," say the members. "How many organizations we have. Look at our statistical report." But do you think that men are impressed with the boldness of the Church's plans for salvation? Does it not seem rather to take counsel of its fears? Is it not timid, apologetic? Is it practising Christian daring in its arrangements for the Gospel? If the Church is afraid to preach the saving Gospel of Christ to men, who then shall come to their rescue?

To a church that was afraid there came a new pastor. He was not a very able preacher. But he knew the Book. He was a bold preacher and worker. He saw the situation. After a time he called the officers together and spoke to them. "We are not indulging in any adventure for Christ," he said. "We are fighting too safe and easy a battle. We are not winning anything, least of all, souls. We have too little Christian daring."

They scarcely understood him at first. But when they had listened for several months to his preaching they knew. He struck the note of adventure for Christ. He was not eloquent. He was inclined to be quiet, even shy. But his touch upon the Gospel was firm and bold. He was not ashamed to speak with outspoken speech. He lost his timidity when he preached. He never hesitated to say that men are sinners and that they need a Saviour. Soon the contagion of his boldness spread. The officers and others put their hand to the work. They used personal touch and testimony. They visited, went after people. It was not that they had so many plans, but they were bold. They were daring enough to use the church in wider ways to win men. It became a bold church. They attained in time a freer hand, a wider swing in the Gospel. *Amplius!*

Christian boldness with souls. This also. We treat men as if they were far away, hard to reach. We are timid about them. Conventionalities bind us. Who would think of speaking to such an one? He has been here a quarter of a century. An attendant of the church too. We take too much for granted. Perhaps he wants to be spoken to about his soul. If only some one, minister, officer, or private member, would violate the fixed silence of years and speak to him. A little more violence with souls would be in the spirit of Christian daring. A tone of urgency, persuasion, a note of fear,

might win some one. "Oh, beloved, give your heart to God. Come to Christ and find salvation!" If the Church would but grow desperate once more in calling men to the Saviour. We are so easy with our invitations to men. We are not bold to fight for souls.

Boldness in prayer. The least obvious but most necessary thing of all. A college professor began praying for a brilliant but wayward student. It became his daily habit. The student left college, and the years swept on. A decade, a half generation, a score of years. No word from the object of his supplications. The professor kept on praying. At length came word from a far corner of the world. He had died confessing his penitence and faith. Prayer is bold.

In what terms of daring the Scripture speaks of prayer. Pray and faint not. Pray without ceasing. Pray importunate prayers—*barefaced* prayers. Pray mountain-moving prayers. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in the time of need." The same word—*free* utterance, unreserved, strong, confident speech with God. Boldness in prayer! When the Church grows bold and daring in prayer, victory begins. When the Church pours out prayer, releases it as in volume, sends it out and up as a pent-up force—this is boldness in prayer.

XV

EXPLORING FOR SOULS



THE old way is still the way. The kingdom is built by individual laborers on the walls. Converted men and women go out and find others. The first impulse is from Christ Himself. Thence it goes on and on, like the widening of the circle when a stone is dropped into the water. The New Testament model stands without argument. The Master spoke to Andrew. Under the propulsion of His word Andrew found his own brother Simon. Jesus found Philip. With the thrill of Christ's discovery upon him Philip immediately turned to the discovery of others. Thus Nathanael was found. To call this a method is to use too light a word. It is the fundamental law of growth for the Kingdom of God. Souls are found by souls.

The question was asked before a large group of Christian men, "How were you brought to Christ and the Church?" "Mothers and fathers." "Preachers and teachers." "The church and Sunday School." These were frequent. But there was a running fire of answers like these—A friend, a testimony, a fellow-traveller on the train, a conversation at the club, a letter, a chance meeting, a

word dropped, a visitor in the home, a business acquaintance. One man said, "A little child." This man had a story to tell. Altogether it was a lesson in spiritual architecture. The builder and maker is God. One might have supposed that the minister who asked the question would have felt a pang of disappointment. So few spoke of sermons. He knew too well the working of the Spirit of God to falter in his preaching.

The power of the Church is not the power of the organization, but of the individual. The Church rests upon personality. "Upon this rock." Find the man and send him out to explore. Preaching and teaching will work through him. Most of all the Spirit will work through him. This is the masterful way by which salvation spreads. "He findeth first his own brother."

The Church is rich in personality. It is an educator of men. It fits them to serve. It is a liberal education of mind and heart to walk for years in the aisles of the churches, to sit for a decade or a generation in church pews. You cannot overestimate what the Church does through the generations by way of charging personality with spiritual intelligence and experience. The historian Green found it necessary when he wrote of England's story, with its depth of spiritual content, to pass by figures of military and political history, and to find place for "the figures of the missionary, the poet, the printer, the merchant, or the philosopher."

The Christian Church is rich in such figures. Yet it is not these alone that constitute the strength and riches of the Church. Its more important work is with one or two talent men, rather than possessors of the rarer five. The fortunes of the Lord's Kingdom, humanly speaking, rests with the average man, in whom religion is like deep running water, following "its own still way."

What is all this training of personalities in the Church for unless it be that they may help Christ with His priceless work among men? A little child in one of the older English novels is watching with his mother the glow in the evening sky. "Mother," said he, "I want to grow up and help God paint the sky." Christian men and women grow up in the Church, not merely to browse upon the Church's lovely meadows, but to do something also for the Gospel of the glory of God.

An important part of the minister's strategy as himself a winner of souls is to train Christian believers how to find souls. He has the best example that he could have—Jesus trained the twelve. He deepened their experience, developed their personality, gave them their word to speak. The mobilizing of personality is one of the hardest things the Church has to do, and one of the richest.

A pastor sat down one day to look over the individual forces of his congregation. There was such a dearth of personal workers. He was almost in despair. He had not gone far in his in-

quiry until he began to be astonished. Going over his list he found dozens of people who might be helping. It was the beginning of a new era in his work. It was like a revival in the region of personality. This was a pastor's way of exploring his own field. The result with him was the formation of a plan for the deployment of personality in the Church. The results were beyond all expectation. There was not much to the plan—outwardly. They prayed much together—a little group. They studied the Bible, talked about souls, grew in love themselves and in willingness. It went deep. The pastor had a group of persons who had warm hearts, glowing faces, and a kindly pressure of the hand. More than all they knew Him whom they had believed. Not much was said about speaking. There are so many who cannot speak. It is not necessary in every case. It is not merely the things we say that convert men. We must not overestimate speech. Glowing fires in the heart spread.

To take these average Christians that we find in the Church and put them in the line of battle, transforming their excuses into service, capitalizing their timidity and backwardness, is one of the Church's finest opportunities. The Church is rich in personal force. The quantity of unused talent is amazing. These same quiet persons with handicaps of different kinds are the hope of the Church. The minister will become a student of these things,

but he will have surprises from time to time. The least likely often turn out to be rare explorers of souls in their own right. You cannot give men who are in any degree receptive a long tutelage in spiritual dynamics without inspiring them to do unexpected things. Here is one minister's story of a blacksmith.

"He has little of what is called ability. Really the only school he ever knew well was the school of Christ. He is not handy with books, but he knows how to handle the word. He knows little of science, and nothing of art, but he has a passion for souls. There are few men in our community who are as useful as he. He is always watching for souls. His skill is the skill of love. He finds men and brings them. It is almost painful to hear him make a speech in public. But when he talks to a soul, he is eloquent. Even the minister did not know about him, until one day he traced several conversions to his door."

Of course this is the familiar truth of the value of the average life, but the Church is slow to learn it. Ministers lean overmuch upon strong people, the leaders of the Church. Always these are called upon. Meantime there is much unused talent, much ground lying fallow. We think that we have few workers in the flock. There are many, if we will find them and set them to work. Unpromising people astonish us by what they can do. The wise learn from the ignorant. The strong are debtors

to the weak. Far-travelled people come back to their own community to find that some village philosopher knows more than they have learned in their travels. Not seldom there is a Christian with few talents who can tell you much about the Christian life. The Christian on his knees, says Pascal, can see farther than the philosopher on tiptoes. Pent-up people, dwellers in the land of counterpane, inhabitants of small corners in life are not seldom our best teachers and ablest personal workers. They have had much opportunity to live in the deep things. When the writer was a young minister, he learned more about the Christian life than the books could teach him from a Christian woman who had spent years in a single room. The young people in a village church laughed at the public prayers of an illiterate son of toil. But it is safe to say that after years his prayers are found in their hearts.

If the minister is fortunate enough to start the fires burning in this way, other results will follow. The revival of personal force in the Church cannot but bring more general revival. Two or three who are gathered together for the quickening of their own souls are enough. When a number have begun to think and talk about themselves and what they can do, they will begin to explore for others. They cannot be held back. It shall be as it was in the first days, when Jesus called Andrew and Andrew went at once to find his brother.

Souls are hard to find. They hide themselves out of sight. They put up barriers of various kinds. They entrench themselves. They may be very near, but those who are nearest are often the hardest to find. Our own kindred, for example, how little we know about them. We have not yet discovered them. Our friends are hard to find. "We never talk about religion," said one friend of another. Fear, embarrassment, ties your tongue. You respect your friend's feelings. You do not wish to be personal. Think of walking for years with a friend, and "knowing his buttons" only, not his soul. So it is that souls are hedged about. Sin too, like a cuttle-fish, throws its cloud of ink around souls and hides them.

But souls are also easy to find. They are near and the way is open. The Spirit of God makes use of many ways and incidents. "Thou canst not tell." We expect opportunity to come in "full dress." But souls do not come that way. They pass by, they drift by. They are around the corner, in the same shop. No trouble to find them. Scores of people are so near that they cannot be missed. Yet how often we overlook things that are close to us. People do not come to church well in our neighbourhood. If we knew how to practise the art of invitation, we might win them. One invitation is not enough. A man in one of the churches was gifted in this art. He could do little else, this was his special personal touch. When

he gave you an invitation you felt that it was a high favour. It was so direct and warm that you knew that it was meant for you.


Watching for souls keeps a minister busy all his days. Sermons require vast time, the more the better. Exploring for souls must go on always. There is no dullness in a minister's life. He is busy with search. Around him will be others who will have caught the same spirit. Most churches could take a new society—S. E. S. *Society for the Exploration of Souls!* The passion for exploration will possess the members of this society. They believe that somebody is lost and they must find him. We have heard of a minister who preached a sermon with two headings. First. There are plenty of people in the world who are lost. Second. There must be plenty of people in the Church to find them. "The Russians," he said, "have a proverb about a peasant who went through the woods and saw no fire-wood. What a pity for a Christian to go through a world filled with people, and not find any one for Christ."

Kipling does not picture an easy time for his "Explorer." Trackless deserts, impassable mountains, heat and cold and thirst and weariness and loneliness. God always whispers in his heart:

"Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

XVI

THE ASSET OF YOUTH

N Old Testament scene not easily forgotten is that where the prophet Elijah took the widow's son at Zarephath, whose breath was gone out of him, up to his own chamber and laid him upon his own bed. In imagination we can see what the prophet did—stretched himself three times upon the body of the child, with an anguished cry, "O Jehovah, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come unto him again." His own chamber, his own bed, his own body, were none too good to use for the benefit of one child. Patiently he worked over him. Three times he climbed upon the bed and laid his body close to the body of the child. Did he feel in his own heart that he might be touching some spring of power? It is a parable of what the Church and the Church's prophets must do for the most precious of all the Church's possessions—the heart of a child.

There is no mistaking the fact that the most important personal asset of the Church is—Youth. The Master's action spoke louder than words, when He set a child in the midst of His disciples. Indifference to young life is the most alarming kind of spiritual blindness. Neglect of children and

youth is the Church's unpardonable sin. Un-estimated and priceless resources lie within easy reach of the Church in the multitude of youthful hearts. It is spiritual suicide not to lay a strong hand upon such treasure and claim it for Christ. Let the Church and its ministers pray for "the kingdom *and patience* which are in Jesus."

Let us try to set forth some of the strategies of the ministry in behalf of youth. The first of these is the fact that the whole Gospel of Christ turns in the direction of youth. Christianity began with a child: it continues with the child. Its fortunes are wrapped up with youth. It is a young faith. It has a young spirit. Christ Himself is always young. "Strong Son of God, immortal love!" sings Tennyson. The first mistake is made when we allow the Gospel to be identified too much with age. It claims all ages from the cradle to the grave and welcomes them, but its original association is with youth. The Founder of Christianity was a young man when He did His work. He drew about Him a company of young men. He welcomed little children: He looked upon youth and loved it. No minister who is keenly alive to the interests of youth will allow the Gospel to grow old in his hands. He will keep it new and fresh and young.

It is no disparagement then to a minister to say that his ministry is a youthful one. The contrary indeed, especially if it means that he has an in-

curable interest in children and youth. In this he is like his Master. His heart always goes out to young hearts, nor is he ashamed to confess that the chief passion of his ministry is the child. A famous Greek philosopher ridiculed an enemy of his by saying—"He teaches children." It is otherwise in the Christian Church. They who teach and win little children have double honour. It is royal work indeed, and the best preparation for it is just the preparation of love.

That prince of teachers, Arnold of Rugby, knew about this. "Whenever I find that I can receive a new boy into the school without emotion," wrote Arnold, "I shall know that it is time for me to be off." To imagine a pastor who can think of the young hearts about him without emotion is impossible. On the contrary he will be willing himself to be a child if he can but touch the child and make his soul come again. He will keep himself close to the spirit of youth, loving young hearts and lifting them to God. It will be exhausting work, but he will do it. He will stretch his own body upon the life of the child. His most wearing work will be to do the kind of praying that youth needs to hold it safe, but he will do this also.

"What have you been studying this morning?" said a member of a minister's family to him at lunch time. "I have not been studying," was his reply. "I have been praying for the young of the flock." Such a minister realizes, as all of us

should, that young Christians are caught early. They begin in the cradle. As Paul said of Timothy—"from a child." The strategy of strong prayer cannot be neglected.

Few subjects will interest the minister more than the religious training of the young. Strange to say it is not easy to center the mind of the Church on this subject. The average congregation neglects its school of religion. Problems of finance are greater in the eyes of most church boards than problems of religious training of the young. If anything in the parish deserves the maximum of talent, time and pains, it is the Sunday School and Young People's Society. Fruitful fields of evangelism are found here ready for harvest. The minister will have no little concern for leaders and teachers of the young. The crux of the situation lies here. The Sunday School should be the way into the Church. Often it is the way out into the world. The Church loses like a sieve at this point. Parents, teachers and ministers working together are barely enough to guard the defenses of the School.

Much of this work belongs to others, but the minister will not excuse himself too easily. It is one of his major responsibilities and one of his finest victories. A pastor once deplored his failure in the ministry. In a considerable time only one person—and that a child—had joined the church. But the child became a famous missionary. Noth-

ing tries the average pastor more than the task of holding the young. Brain and heart, with hours of study and prayer, will be well spent in such a task. One child won to Christ is a rich reward. Ways of dealing successfully with the religious nature of young people do not receive sufficient attention in religious circles. Haphazard is still the rule. It will not remain so. In the next decade or so the Church will make rapid progress in the field of religious education. It is imperative for it to do so. Gaps should be closed up. The Church's hand upon the child should be gentle but firm.

The pastor of whom we are thinking is a strong believer in youth. He refuses to regard young people as a problem. To him they are an asset, an opportunity. He would probably say about the revolt of youth—"Yes, I know what you mean. There are things that make us deeply anxious. But the Church is a hopeful body. It is old with the centuries, but it is also young and strong and vital, like the strong Son of God. The Church will never give up, it will never let go its hold upon youth. It will still find ways to work with them and win them to Christ." This is his spirit. You will not find him decrying the youth of to-day. He will spend his time praying and working for them.

The truth is that the Church must claim the heart of youth, and must study unceasingly to find ways of making the claim good. Points of view either help or hinder. For example, it does not

help to forget that certain characteristics are to be expected in youth. Youth is bright, interesting, alert, full of surprise and fascination. But all is not smooth sailing. No one can prophesy about its tangents, its vagaries, the whole unexpectedness of its course. It seems illogical, yet youth has its reasons. To-day it will disappoint you, nonplus you, depress you. To-morrow it will revive you, hearten and lift you. Discouragement and disappointment about youth will drive you to your knees: then the flood comes and the heart of youth is open. It is worth years of your life to recall some dear youth, ruddy and fair-haired like David, who stepped out on the side of Christ. What a helper he has been in the world!

This minister will understand right well the sin of dullness. Religion is not dull. The Bible is not dull. The Church is not dull. Religion is interesting. So is the Bible. So are the Church and the Sunday School. These are easy things to say. But how often we forget, and allow humdrum to creep into our ministry. We are heavy, uninteresting. We lack buoyancy. We talk more of duty than of joy. Without meaning to do so we make the Christian life a bit forbidding, not quite attractive. It is a good thing for a minister in his pulpit to be thinking of youth. It will save him from dullness. He will say to himself, "Be a bit more sprightly, more youthful. Make religion interesting. Make it fine and heroic. Make the

Bible attractive." The minister who helps the children and youth of his flock to grow to manhood and womanhood with the feeling that the Bible is the most interesting book in the world will have done a great thing.

The heart of youth is impressionable. Slight touches, impressions, influences, count. Single words are enough to change a whole life. "Young man, you belong to God." A boy heard this in a sermon and was never able afterwards to forget it. His name was Wendell Phillips. A young minister who had an easy way with young people linked arms with a boy on the street one day and talked with him intimately for a few minutes as they walked about the Christian life. The matter was decided then and there. Ultimately he entered the ministry. The work of a vigilant pastor evangelist among the young is without limit. Young people will come to talk to him about their questions and problems. They are trying to think things through in their own way. He will try to understand them, and his love and patience will be winsome. His best work will be done at points where youth is likely to be swept away. A young man who was almost at the end of his college course said, "I have seen many students drifting into agnosticism. My minister's steadying touch has helped to keep me straight." Blessed is the man of God who knows the secret of the steadying touch for youth.

Much more can be done than is usual in the public teaching of children and youth. Wise ministers drop many "handfuls of purpose" in the pulpit for young hearts. No fear of these being missed. Wise ministers too speak to the youth of the Church often in Sunday School, Young People's Society, and other clubs and organizations. These are the times to speak to the point. Such opportunities are not to be wasted in generalities. If we had thousands of ministers where there are scores who speak effectively to children and youth, it would be a victory for evangelism in the Church. We do not hear that theological schools teach this art. To hold a children's meeting and leave good seed of the Gospel to grow in young minds in time to come is the highest kind of skill.

It is a time for the Church and its ministers to consider with great definiteness what the Church owes to the youth of the land. A judge of the court in a large city gave his answer in public print—"Send your boy or girl out into the world equipped with a definite set of religious standards." As for the Church its duty is first to claim youth, then to train youth, and last of all to win youth. For the Church cannot stop until the end is reached.


The pastor evangelist has thought some of these things out. He keeps a Registry of Youth that is more important than the church roll. The name of every child and youth in the congregation is

found in this book, and the minister pores over it and prays over it. Life histories are written here from the cradle on—tendencies, gifts, dangers, likes and dislikes, family connections, schools and colleges, friendships. In a long pastorate a child can be traced from birth to middle years.

Here is a record of where the pastor talked with him or wrote him a letter. Studying this list, the pastor knows when the time is at hand. There is psychology in this, and deep wisdom besides. Mothers know better than ministers. A mother of a number of children saw them all in the church with their parents. "How did she do it?" was often asked. "I brought them at twelve like Jesus Himself," was her reply. When the pastor knows the time, he finds the boy or girl and presses for decision. Or he plans with the officers for a decision day in the Sunday School, or Young People's Society. Or he holds a meeting of some kind particularly adapted to the young. Communicants' classes are useful, furnishing a rich opportunity for the minister to seal the heart of youth with Christian truth. When young persons are thoughtful, when the minister observes that the wistfulness of youth is intensified, he will ask to be guided especially in his preaching. His best sermons, whether eloquent or not, will be those that contain some word or thought that will live in a young heart.

XVII

RELIGION IS: TO VISIT

O large a subject as evangelism may be expected to develop along many different lines. In most instances it is likely to mean fresh emphasis of meetings and preaching. In other cases it will mean increased emphasis of the individual as a worker in contact with others. This latter form of evangelism is often described under such titles as Personal Work, Personal Touch, or Personal Evangelism. It implies always a definite personal dedication to the work of approaching and touching souls and winning them to Christ. Usually this refers to the work of laymen. The Church like other bodies suffers from inertia. Its action is slow, lacking in direction and comprehension. Ministers are not free from this temptation. There is an inertia of the ministry. Many pastors give themselves with unremitting toil to the task of preaching and neglect the other side of their ministry that has to do with personal contact. They win men of course from the height of the pulpit. They might win many more if they met the people more freely on the lower levels of life.

More difficult however is the task of mobilizing the force of laymen in the church for personal

touch. Life is thronged with duties. "Engagements" are the bane of modern life. Visiting is a thing of the past. Nobody has time. What is more, few have inclination. To most persons church membership means attendance upon public worship, and financial support of the church and its work. It means also fellowship and friendship, but this in limited circles. A few persons in the average church know one another. There is little general circulation of life—little breadth of acquaintance. Worshippers go in and out of their churches year in and year out. They know one another in a distant manner. Some bow politely in the vestibule. But they are really strangers to one another. As to the large number of non-members who are in attendance upon the churches, it is fortunate if they experience any personal contact whatsoever. Now and then it happens that a non-member will attend a church for six months or a year and have nothing approaching a personal touch from the church. The watchful minister will discover the visitor and put the name on his parish list. Occasionally there will be found a committee of some kind—an ushers' or an officers' committee—that greets strangers. But—*ne plus ultra!* To the body of the members these strangers, some of whom are seekers after the things that are spoken of in the churches, are as aliens. It is not strange if some of them begin to say—No man cares for my soul.

In some quarters pastoral visiting suffers eclipse. Often it dwindles into an ineffective, wasteful round of social calls. Some, feeling how paltry it is, have given it up altogether. They prefer to give the time to study and administration. It is a serious mistake to surrender the principal opportunity of personal contact between minister and people. More visiting—not less. It should not resume the formidable character of earlier generations. Nevertheless it should keep in mind always the religious welfare of souls. It is one of the best opportunities the minister has for quiet evangelism. Some words of direct religious application are spoken. Inquiries are made about members of the household. Usually a prayer is made. It may be brief and simple. It may be said standing as the minister leaves. It may be a mere benediction. The sick-room affords a rare opportunity, not always appreciated by ministers.

In every case the pastor's visit should leave some religious impression. What opportunities for conversations, answering questions, meeting problems, touching hearts, giving consolation! If we ministers can but learn how to make each visit memorable. Words may be spoken that will never be forgotten. A silent force for good is set to work in the home. "The minister called to-day," the mother announces at the evening table, "and inquired particularly for each of you." She did not add that he had prayed for each member of the

family by name. At any rate the announcement introduces the subject of religion and the church in the family circle. This kind of evangelism sinks deep. It reaches far. Amid many changes one thing remains the same in the life of the minister—he must be a visitor.

A neglected force in the church is visiting done by officers. Once it was a feature of church life, but it has fallen by the way. One or two out of a score or more of officers visit. The time is favourable now for reviving the custom. Every member canvasses, financial campaigns, special movements, have convinced officers in the churches what general visitation will do. If visiting can be used to increase religious income, why not to promote religion itself? The minister who makes use of the growing conviction of officers on the subject of visiting will accomplish a useful strategy. A church in which there is going on constant circulation of influence from officers to people is sure to have deep religious vitality. The good that would come to officers themselves would be incalculable.

A timid officer in one of the churches was persuaded to do some visiting. He went trembling to his task. He knew that he would be a failure. He was sure that he could not say a word about personal religion. When he returned he was under the spell of a new experience. It was all a delightful surprise. Those whom he visited were so cordial and receptive. They wanted to be talked to.

To his surprise, it was easy to talk to them. "Why, in a few minutes we were discussing our experiences and needs. Before I knew it I was talking about Christ." If such examples could be multiplied, a new era would come in the church. There is far too little conversation about religion among the people. The subject is kept in the background. Visiting tends to bring it out into the open.

On the whole the church meets with its most signal failure at the point of personal evangelism. However strong it may be in worship and preaching, it is lamentably weak in personal contact and influence. And this notwithstanding the wealth of personality at the command of the church. More circulation of the personal values in the congregation is needed. Cultivation of the grace of giving is a notable characteristic of modern churches. Why not an equally vigorous cultivation of the grace of visitation? Incalculable forces of evangelism reside in personal interest and contact, in individual grace and persuasiveness, in the multiplying of invitations, in the capitalizing of individual testimony. Much unconscious personal work is accomplished in these ways. Thus evangelism in every-day life supplements the evangelism of the pulpit.

Suppose that a new era of Christian visitation could come into the church, within and beyond the limits of congregations. There would be definite

and precise arrangements. But it would not be done mechanically. The people would be encouraged to think of it as a Christian grace. "Pure religion and undefiled," writes the practical apostle James, "before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Visiting done "before our God and Father," is not likely to suffer the disrepute of church calling and committee visitation. Christianity from the beginning has been a household faith. The early Christians went into one another's homes, visiting, conversing, testifying, and breaking bread in the name of Christ. Large use was made of the personal force of the membership.

The new era in fact is already here. Fresh attention is being given to the subject of personal touch and individual work in the life of the Church. Christian visiting is at the front in many minds. Not formal and social visiting, but visiting in the interest of the Gospel of Christ. While many are quick to say that the age of visiting is gone by, that people in the church are too busy, that no one expects or desires visits, there are others who have both discernment and faith in this matter. They see that a large, unused force is here. They believe that the Church is spending a disproportionate amount of energy in services and organizations, and is losing on the side of personal contact. They believe that this loss can be repaired, that even in our preoccupied modern life, the

Church can be won back to this difficult but winsome grace of visitation. They believe that there is a power in visitation that can be mobilized for the Church and Kingdom of God. They believe that personal contact is the need of the hour as much as preaching. They are asking especially, in the new consideration that is being given to the subject of evangelism, whether it may not be possible to establish a closer connection between visiting and soul-winning.

No minister in his parish to-day can afford to pass by the grace of visiting. The languishing life of churches needs fresh circulation of life. Not only so, communities need the touch of interest, fellowship and Christian testimony from the Church. When the pastor turns his attention to the promotion of personal contact, he undertakes a good work. He puts the matter, not on social, but on religious grounds. He brings his group together for study and training. Presently they begin to go out, usually "two by two." Names are given to them and reports are expected. Frequently they return with valuable information. Open doors have been found. Souls have been discovered. Religious decisions have taken place. A new baptism of power has come to the visitors.

This is not a theory. It is actually being done. From an increasing number of churches encouraging reports come of the results of campaigns of visiting. In some cases it is an annual occurrence.

Or it is seasonal, in the pre-Easter period, or in the autumn, as a part of the rally of church forces and activities after summer relaxation. The results of these visitations, with opportunities for acquaintance, reminiscence, fellowship, impression, are often surprising. It is understood that the subject of personal religion shall always be spoken of freely. The obscurity that surrounds personal religion is banished. Religion is brought into the open. Conversation on the subject is promoted. Interest and sympathy are deepened. Personal religion receives new emphasis.


The value of visiting as an evangelistic force is being extended to community life. This is a much needed work of the church, to secure contact with people outside of the congregation. As this chapter is being written, a report comes from one of the larger cities of the mobilizing of visitation by a group of churches in behalf of a community. It may be taken as an example of what can be accomplished. A force of sixty visitors is at work, men, women and young people. Each night, after dinner, in one of the churches, a brief inspirational address is given, with instructions from a leader. Cards are given to the visitors, with the names of the persons to be visited. Upon entering a home they are to come at once to the point and speak boldly of Jesus Christ. It is no ordinary social call. *It is a visit on behalf of Christ!* The report says that immediate results have appeared. Many

are coming to the church for the first time in years. Some will unite with the church, professing their faith. Idle Christians, with church letters in trunks and desks, will come again into the active ranks. A new atmosphere is created throughout the community, and a new feeling toward the church. The workers are enthused. They have found new power. A new spiritual force seems to have been liberated. Religion is—to visit!

Religion that does not visit has lost some of its power. Can it be that something of the radiance of Christianity has disappeared in our busy days because we have neglected to visit? It is a difficult and bold thing to undertake. But apostolic initiative is needed as few things else are needed in the Church to-day. Let the Church learn once more to practise the grace of visiting.

XVIII

CONVERSATION AND LETTERS

HE apostle John evidently preferred conversation to letter-writing. For he wrote in his Second Epistle, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write them with paper and ink; but I hope to come unto you and to speak face to face, that your joy may be made full." He expresses again his distrust of paper and ink in his Third Epistle, in almost the same words, except that here he says "ink and pen." It is a strange comment on the apostle's preference for conversation that here are three precious little letters, the shortest with only thirteen verses, that are imperishable.

Both conversation and letter-writing are invaluable aids in evangelism. The Spirit is breathed into the spoken word, and the same Spirit is diffused in the written word. God sent patriarchs, prophets and poets to speak in the old time, and in the end of the days He spoke to us in His Son. Always it is the spoken word that is powerful. But the spoken word is itself dependent upon the written word. Between tongue and pen there is no debate. God uses both. Ministers, teachers, and all workers for Christ, do well to study the best uses of these two great agencies of the Spirit.

They that love the Lord should speak, and by the same token they should write.

The apostle John himself suggests reasons for setting a high value upon conversation. It is "face to face" speaking. And again the result is "that your joy may be made full." When two persons sit down to talk face to face, it is as if their souls were open the one to the other. Their conversation becomes a living thing. The play of personality in conversation is marvellous. Personal touch and expression are at their best. The eye lights up and reflects the glow of feeling within. The face reveals the riches of the inner life. The voice rises and falls with the inflections of interest and emphasis. Delicate senses and shadings of words come to the lips even of untrained persons, and communicate the power of personal conviction. The hand too will reach out and touch the hand or shoulder of another, or slight convincing gestures will add to the fervour of the hour. In the warm glow of conversation the mind expands and discloses new and undiscovered depths of feeling. Unexpected thoughts come to birth also and awaken quick response. Doorways of the heart open as one friend sharpeneth the countenance of another. In such hours of communion the worth of the soul increases, life gains a wider horizon, and frequently in the heart there comes a joyous consciousness of a Third Companion. God is often very near when two friends converse.

The memory of some great conversation stands out in most of our minds. But probably we recall best the smaller conversations, when some soul spoke briefly, maybe in passing, and left a thought in the heart. A young man was graduating from an eastern college. He was undecided about his life-work. A home missionary from the far west sought him out after commencement and spoke to him about the call to the Christian ministry. It proved to be the decisive word. Dark subjects grow brighter, difficulties become easier, duties seem more inviting, in the light of another's face. Dangers frankly pointed out in conversation, testimonies offered, invitations given, subjects discussed, have the weight of personality behind them. Discreet praise from some Sir Hubert stimulates us. A word of personal conviction dropped opens a door. Ministers themselves are often strengthened for their heavy tasks by simple and unlearned folk in the congregation. One such was accustomed to take his minister home in his buggy after the prayer-meeting. On such occasions it was the pastor's habit to listen quietly to the outpourings of an untaught but full heart. Years have not dimmed the value of those conversations in the dark with this philosopher of the friendly road.

If we realized more fully the stimulus and help that come through conversation, we would give more attention to it as a means of grace. The

minister prays to be guided and helped in preaching. Does he also pray to be directed by the Spirit in conversation? Conversation may reach where preaching will not go. There are many barriers to preaching. Not infrequently souls are on their guard against it. But in conversation the play of personality throws them off their guard. The element of friendliness and intimacy comes into private conversation, and doors of the heart are opened that at other times remain closed.

In every community there are persons—more in number than we suppose—who would like to talk and be talked to. Any minister of experience knows that this is true. Again and again you have been surprised to find that the barriers to conversation which you thought existed were not real. There are those in all the congregations, or in the community among the non-attendant class, who say to themselves in the secret of their hearts—"Oh, for a heart to heart talk on the problems of life with some one who knows. The minister probably thinks that I am not interested in religion, I certainly do not show that I am. But if he only knew how much I would like to have a conversation with him on the subject."

A pastor received an unintended rebuke when a person who was uniting with his church said to the officers, "If somebody had talked to me any time during the past year about personal religion I would have been ready to come. I have been

longing to have a religious conversation." The pastor had thought of this person as an impervious soul. Suppose that a hundred persons in a congregation should decide to let religion into conversation—no one can say what results would follow. For the most part the subject is kept out of conversation. It is too "personal." People do not like to discuss such intimate subjects. Are you sure of this? Try it and see. It is a grave mistake to think that people do not want to talk about religion. Better to say to one's self each day, "I am going to meet some one to-day to whom I ought to talk about Christ and personal religion. It may be that he is longing for such a conversation. God help me to be ready."

More often than otherwise the barriers will be down and you can enter in. Do you remember the able lawyer of your community, and how you stood in awe of him? He was older and wiser than you. You could not imagine yourself sitting down to talk with him face to face. Apparently he was utterly indifferent to religion. Yet the time came. *He sent for you!* You recall how you went trembling, and how without circumlocution he confronted you with his secret problem. "I have long wanted to believe," he said. "All my life I have been straining after faith. But, alas! I can't improvise a faith." You have remembered his word all the years—*I can't improvise a faith!* You were a young minister, but God strengthened you,

and you talked to him about faith, not as the great problem, but as the great simplicity, joy and privilege of life. You spoke to him about yielding himself to God in Christ, you said that what he needed was to make the great surrender. You were bold to say that if he did this, the difficulty of improvising a faith would disappear.

Conversation affords a quiet and effective form of evangelism that is open to great numbers of believers. Revivals in churches have more than once been traced to the fact that a group of persons had resolved to let no day go by without a religious conversation. This was Dwight L. Moody's habit for years. "It is said of Mr. Moody that he never let a day go by without speaking to somebody about Christ. He went to bed one night and could not sleep. Twenty minutes after eleven, and still no sleep. A quarter to twelve, and he was still awake. He had not kept his promise. He arose and dressed himself, and rushed out of the house. As he turned the corner he ran into a man who said something that I cannot repeat in public. Mr. Moody shouted out to him, "Are you a Christian?" The man said, "None of your business." Mr. Moody said, "Why, yes, it is my business." The man squared himself up and said, "If it is your business, then I know your name. Your name is D. L. Moody."¹

¹ From *Evangelistic Sermons of J. Wilbur Chapman*, compiled and edited by Edgar Whitaker Work, p. 79.

Thousands and tens of thousands of ministers and members of the Christian Church conversing daily with others about personal religion could not but be a fruitful form of evangelism. Much of this conversation would be nothing prolonged or stately. Most persons converse informally. Religious conversation such as is needed is not a disquisition. It is more likely to be disjointed, touching, it may be lightly, upon this or that point. Yet there is a personal urgency about it that makes it memorable. A word may be spoken that lives in the mind. Words are wonderful. Language is the great human sacrament. It is told of a man in Exeter, England, that he had a way of dropping words in conversation that changed men's lives.


Our Lord's supreme method with souls was not preaching, but conversation. Not many of His sermons are recorded in the Gospels. He wrote no books. But He talked constantly to the people. Nearly a score of His private interviews with individuals are found in the New Testament. He built His Kingdom on conversation. It was His way of reaching the individual. How ready they seemed to be to talk with Him. Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, the woman at the well, the two disciples on the way to Emmaus—these and others in the New Testament, are but types of the pent-up souls around us who would welcome conversation. The only art that is needed is the art of

one in love with Christ and filled with passion for souls.

Letters are conversation in another form. As much or more could be said about letters as an effective way of evangelism. In a way they are more direct and personal than conversation. The New Testament is the most notable example of the use of letters. Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books are epistolary. Here again it is the play of personality that is felt. They said of the apostle Paul, "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." But "his letters, they say, are weighty and strong." Many of God's people cannot speak effectively. But they can write. A widespread dedication of pens to Christ is needed. This is one kind of evangelistic campaign that has never been widely used. Suppose that groups of Christians, say an official board of a church, or the members of one of the organizations, or even the entire congregation, should write letters daily for a week to individuals, accompanying them with earnest prayer—what a kindling ministry of the Spirit it would be. Suppose that a minister should determine to let no day go by for a month without a written message to one or more souls, praying much in the Spirit for his letters. Who shall say that "all the leaping wonder and holy fear of creation" might not attend such methods of personal work for souls? "As keys open chests, letters open breasts."

XIX

BUILDING ERAS

HE strong New Testament word *edify* is one with which the minister in pulpit and pastorate has always to reckon. The times when the church is being edified—built up from the foundation—are likely to prove times of refreshing. To bring on building eras in the church, when men are built up on the most holy faith, is one of the principal aspirations of a sincere and devoted ministry.

When the apostle Paul said that “it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe,” he was not commending any form of trivial preaching. This could not have been for the reason that he was speaking of “the word of the cross.” Preaching is serious business, and from time to time the preacher will do well to search his heart respecting the aim and quality of his spoken word. Does he speak to edification—to the building up of souls in God? Much criticism is heard to-day as to what ministers preach about. It were wiser to ask—What do they not preach about? Let every minister study carefully his omissions.

A primary need of our times is that the church through its ministry should give testimony with

power to its beliefs. Edification, exhortation, consolation are the apostolic tests of prophesying. Men are not won to Christ by entertainment. They are not converted by mere device and method. The ancient ways by which men came to God are still the ways of Zion. The word and the Spirit of God are the thoroughgoing instruments of the Kingdom. In our times ministers are all too easily tempted to run after novelties in preaching. The problem of attraction is acute. Multitudes pass unheeding the doors of our sanctuaries. How shall we catch them with the arrest of thought?

Temptation enters here. If we can bring men within sound of the Gospel, shall we not do well? So the church launches out upon a career of novelty. The people must be entertained, their senses gratified. They must see drama, pictures. They must hear strange voices, whether spiritual or not. They must be allured by topics, discussions, "attractions" of various kinds. "Let us try a forum," we hear some of the officers saying. A musicale is suggested. Literary talks are in favour for a time. Various terms are used to describe what is needed. Interesting, modern things, human subjects, problems of the hour. The manner must be snappy, right off the reel, a go-getting way of doing things. Whimsicalness mistaken for joy. A sort of sportive spirituality and up-to-date-ness. After this the preaching of the Gospel!

In all this *mêlée* of entertainment and attraction

we do not hear of any one being converted, won to God. It is not certain that those who come to church to have their senses gratified are likely to stay. In their hearts they know that the church is dealing in husks when it has better things to give. The function of the church is to bring men to God, feed their souls, edify them, in spiritual things. The church to-day is languishing in a vain effort to be entertaining. Not a few in the ministry are in mortal danger of losing their power, if not their birthright, in preaching.

The story of a young minister is told here and of his severe but healing experience in his first years. He was starting well. His ministry was proving attractive. His preaching was interesting, varied. The people liked his sermons. One day a kindly officer came to him and said, "My boy, you are doing well. We all enjoy your ministry. You are in your blossom time. Don't forget the roots." He had sense enough to suspect what the good man meant. He began a valiant and unsparing searching of his own heart. Was he in danger of missing the true bread and meat of the Gospel? He assessed his own ministry carefully, weighed it honestly. He saw what he was doing with the Bible. He was snipping it into fragments, searching it for texts, often curious, striking texts, disattached parts. He discovered that his preaching, however interesting, was haphazard. It was unorganized. It had many gaps and omissions. He

was amazed to find that he was giving the people thin edges of the Scripture. He was not teaching the word of God. He was not moving upon the hearts and consciences of his congregation with the mass power of the Bible.

One day when he was studying certain passages in the epistles of Paul that dealt with edification, he said with conviction to himself, "I am trusting to hit-and-miss in my preaching. I am not building the people up in their faith—not edifying the church." He saw plainly how he was slighting the great themes of the Gospel. He realized too, not without pain, that the touch of his ministry was mostly on the surface. He was not gripping men in their souls by the word and Spirit of God. He was not leading lost men to the cross and open tomb of Christ.

It must have been about this time that a minister of renown spoke simply to a group of his younger brethren, saying to them, among other things—"Preach on great texts." It came to him almost with prophetic force. It helped him to get a true footing in his ministry. He saw then that there are many small things in a man's ministry that are to be dealt with. He must be eminently practical. All things to all men. But he must also rise up in his preaching. Always there must be something beyond—more than can be put into words. And all the while, whether on the lower or the higher plane, he must not forget the roots.

Little by little he formed his idea of the ministry and its functions. He saw that he was appointed to be a preacher of the word. He resolved therefore that in every congregation of which he was pastor, he would endeavour to provide for the people a liberal education in biblical knowledge. The people should become acquainted with the Scripture, its structure, scope, development and general contents. He would make sure that those who listened to him should have a full opportunity to know the Gospel. While he knew that he must in the course of his ministry avoid dull uniformity in material and method, must deal with many different subjects, must use many kinds of texts and preach a great variety of sermons—he resolved that he would in all this keep to one idea. He called it, in scriptural language, *edification of the church*, or in the language of his friend, *getting at the roots of things*.

One day in his study it flashed upon him that a minister has after all comparatively few sermons to preach. A ministry of twenty years might mean, at the rate of one hundred sermons a year, two thousand in all. If his ministry should cover a full generation, he might preach as many as three thousand sermons. Add to these of course his weekly lessons and addresses in the prayer-meeting and on special occasions. Not many for a whole lifetime. He realized with what careful economy a preacher should use his time and talent. On the

other hand he felt how great was the opportunity to unfold the truths of revelation, and lay the Gospel of Christ upon the hearts of men.

A part of his own training in the early years consisted of the study of other preachers. He followed the methods of different kinds of preachers, but as time went on he found his greatest satisfaction in those who were known as biblical preachers. Gradually his own way of preaching conformed to this idea of preaching, and the more he practised the art of biblical preaching the more he became interested in evangelism. Much as he loved history, literature, art, science, he learned to feel that the main function of the ministry is to win souls, train them, edify them, comfort them. In due time he found the name—it is good to find a name—that seemed to him to fit his conception of preaching—*Educational Evangelism*. It became his aim to preach no sermon, no matter on what topic, in which there should not be some call to men to become children of God through the adoption of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

We have tried to describe in a few paragraphs the development of one man in the ministry. In general his conclusion was that he must continue in his own gifts, but that the channel of his ministry must be kept deep, sweet and tender in the word of God. He would not discard what was natural to him. His quick ways, his manner of directness and piquancy, his *bon mots*, his fresh-

ness and originality, his appreciation of literary wealth, his touch with things as they are in history and current life, he would abandon nothing of all this. But he would stand constantly on guard to make sure that the church was being edified and souls brought to God, that the great themes of the Gospel were not neglected, and that the topics of grace were running in and out like a refreshing stream in all his pulpit utterances.

So it came to pass that he organized his preaching along lines of general and personal edification and evangelism. He wrote an outline of the general subjects of Christian preaching in a book and on the outside of this book he wrote the title of this chapter—"Building Eras."¹ It became his habit to go back from time to time to the little book, and assess his work in the light of these main topics, inquiring firmly about his omissions. Never a year passed in which he did not go through the little book, as if it were a class curriculum, a course in the heads of divinity. Constantly he said to himself, "I must edify. I must keep getting at the roots."

In the course of the years many turned quietly to the Lord, for the edification of the church, the training of men in the tender, persuasive history of redemption through grace, invariably means the

¹ See Dr. Horace Bushnell's famous sermon, "Building Eras in Religion," a sermon of permanent value to ministers and Christian workers.

winning of men to the faith. No revivals were conducted. Special seasons however were observed, like Christmas and Easter, when preaching of a direct and intensive kind was done. For these as well as other times the advice was remembered about preaching on great texts. Abundant opportunity was given for general preaching, so-called practical subjects, topics of the times, local applications. But the purpose was to make sure that no year went by in which there should not be definite building eras through the preaching of the main subjects of the Christian religion. From time to time the working outline was filled in and broadened. But for years the outline stood somewhat as follows:

First. Sermons on the Bible, to further knowledge of the good Book, and affection for it. Also to promote habits of reading and studying it. Pulpit training of this kind is much needed in the churches. People are densely ignorant of the Bible. Now and then sermons on books of the Bible will be found useful. Open the Book! If the church should happen to fall in love with its own Book, times of refreshing are likely to come. Not merely about it—but preach the Word! In blossom time remember the roots.

Second. Sermons on the basal subject of God and Providence. Many in the average congregation do not know the reasons of belief. But the treatment of this subject should be personal,

not academic or theological, and often with an Old Testament background or example. One of the principal uses of the Old Testament lies in its record of the experience of meeting God. A list of such experiences begins with the first pair in the Garden, then Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Gideon. It is a wonderful volume of Godward histories. "If haply they might feel after him and find him." How near He is! The God and Father of us all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Third. Sermons on the Grace of God, a subject that has many facets like a jewel. Yet it is much neglected as a separate head in spiritual training. The Bible is full of it. When rightly handled it is a persuasive theme, with many personal applications. Many great texts are available for this, such as the "grace" of the benedictions, the "great grace" that was upon the apostles, "the gospel of the grace," "the word of his grace." Many ministers are surprised to discover how lightly they have treated the fountain-head of grace.

Fourth. Sermons on Christ. The minister is always preaching Christ. But he will have many separate sermons. The Gospels are great preaching ground. Incidents, miracles, parables, words, teachings, sermons, and always the shining Person. "Jesus only!" The greatest winsomeness, fineness, and reverence of the art of preaching for this. Make the people know Him,

love Him, believe on Him, worship Him, serve Him.


Fifth. Sermons on the Cross and the Resurrection. At Christmas and Easter and Communion of course. But much more than this. These subjects are to be pervasive. Sin is to be much preached about, always in the light of the cross. Preach salvation by the blood of Christ, atonement, regeneration, forgiveness, sanctification, and the living hope by the resurrection. "The unsearchable riches of Christ."

Sixth. Sermons on the Christian Life, the Church, Worship and Means of Grace. Foundations in love and faith. Make plain the duties but dwell much upon privileges, aids and opportunities. Dignify Christian living, beautify it. Show the grandeur of worship, and its personal comfort. Responsibilities, joys, growth of the Christian life. The future looms large in the most thoughtful kind of preaching, as it does in the Bible. Immortality, Heaven, the Lord's return. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be."

Seventh. Sermons on the Holy Spirit and Prayer. All too infrequent. But very fruitful and much desired by the people. Consolations of God related to these themes. Also life problems, inspiration, personal power and victory over sin. The churches need constant instruction along these lines. The Holy Spirit as ever-present among men, searching, convicting, persuading.

XX

“A NAIL IN HIS HOLY PLACE”

HE disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” It may have been a harmless fun-making title. Street followers may have shouted it after the disciples as they went along. Or it may have reflected pagan contempt and hostility. However it was, the name stuck to the disciples: it still sticks. Other names were used in those thrilling New Testament days. In addition to disciples such simple words as believers and followers were used. Often it was enough to say brethren. There are references in the Gospels and The Acts to the disciples as a company by themselves. “Men that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,” is an illuminative description. Jesus called those who were associated with Him His friends. “No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends.” We suspect from little hints dropped that they were often thought of as companions of The Way. Important too is the use of the term witness or eye-witness, which is strikingly stressed. But the most expressive, the most eloquent, of all names, is the one that was first used in An-

tioch, the name that binds believers by its very sound to the person of Jesus Christ.

Nothing is said in the New Testament about people joining the Church. The early disciples could scarcely have been aware that they were "members" in any formal sense. The first assembling of the Church was altogether informal. It represented however a profound spiritual movement. God was in it. At Pentecost, "there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." Later the number reached five thousand. The increase was rapid, as if by supernatural influence. "The Lord added to them day by day those that were saved." Mention is made of "the multitude of them that believed." "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." In Antioch "much people was added unto the Lord." Such as these are the early New Testament references to the growth of membership in the Church. We are to be guarded apparently against thinking of the early Christians as having joined an organization. They joined Christ, they were added unto the Lord. And this gave ample justification to the language of the apostle Paul later, where membership in the Lord is emphasized. "Now ye are the body of Christ and severally members thereof."

The question is often asked, When did the Christian Church actually begin? Some say that it was on the Day of Pentecost, when the enabling

Spirit was poured out. Others prefer to say that it was when Jesus observed the new Passover Supper for the first time with His disciples, and established the new covenant in His blood. Still others like to think that the Christian Church was organized the moment the Master began calling disciples. John and Andrew and Peter and Philip and Nathanael and James were the first to join and become members. It does not matter.

What we are bound to feel about it is that the movement to get together was irresistible. They did not intend to go out of the old Church of their youth. They were loyal to it, its worship, its Scripture, its fellowship. Jesus Himself stayed in the synagogue, even while He was founding the New Testament Church. But the coming of the new Church was inevitable. They had knowledge of the old, and they builded upon it. But here was something new—mainly a new experience. They had met a Person Who bound them to Himself. Their acquaintance with Him dated for them a new understanding of God and human life.

The main points of the new experience were—*First*. They were conscious of a new *Faith* that centered in Christ and that became the motive power of their life. *Second*. They were quite as conscious of another emotion of their hearts, which they recognized as *Love*, and this also centered in Christ. *Third*. They knew moreover that with this experience of One in Whom they believed and

Whom they passionately loved, *Life* had changed for them. They recognized that the change had its origin in the cross and the open tomb. A new purpose came to them. Sin was repented of. It was pardoned: it lost its hold. Henceforth they are not their own, being sealed by the blood of redemption. *Fourth.* They realized also that with the new Life there came a new *Hope*. It is not merely that they are not afraid of death. They are not afraid of life. Christ had redeemed life, and set in the midst of it the new Christian Hope, which is for the life that now is and the life that is to come. *Fifth.* They knew conclusively too that a new spirit of *Service* now claimed them. Being bought with a price, they knew that the love of Christ constrained them to serve willingly in His cause.

In this manner the Christian Church came about. It was never organized—it grew. So rapid was its growth that we may say that it leaped into being. It was utterly irresistible—it was inevitable. A small group of persons who had this new experience of Christ and His Gospel in their souls was the seed. As the experience spread to others, the Lord added daily to them those that were saved. The beginning was insignificant in numbers. There was little or no ceremonial. Yet it became the profoundest, the most momentous movement the world has ever known.

Its leading characteristic was its vitality. It

was founded, not as an organization, but as an organism: not as an institution, but as a living force. They could not do otherwise than build the new Church on their new experience of Christ. It was too great a thing in their lives to be ignored. They must somehow put their experience to work among men. In our time we are familiar with the claim that men may be Christians outside of the Church. This would have been impossible for the first Christians. They could not refrain from having the Church. They wanted to be on the inside immediately. They craved the privilege of association with those of like faith and experience. They came together naturally, willingly—"those that were saved." They felt a new power in their lives. It was the Lord who added them, not they themselves. Such a vital union as this was never before witnessed in religious history.

This was the origin of the Christian Church. Soon these believers in Jesus began to speak of themselves as the Church. Creeds, forms, rubrics, offices, services, mechanical arrangements, came in due time. Fundamentally, the Christian Church was and is a company of persons who have had an experience of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the crucified, risen Saviour, the Friend of sinners, the Lord and Master of men.

Membership in the Church is a vital part of the Christian program. The Church needs no argument to support it. Souls that have been born of

the Spirit at the foot of the cross feel that they are called forth. This is the meaning of church—*ecclesia*. Right ideas of membership are to be inculcated. Some things that are done in the Church can be duplicated elsewhere. One may pray, worship and serve outside of the Church. But the Church is the place that affords the fullest opportunity for the expression of that experience of Jesus that has inspired the members to assemble themselves. For example, the Church is the only place where the Lord's Supper is regularly observed. This consideration alone has led some to connect themselves with the Church. It has the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper. How can a believer hold himself aloof from the ordinances of God?

The very highest conception of the Church should be presented in terms of a warm and winsome evangelism. Let no one think that it is a mere convenience. It is authoritative. It is a great force to work with. If you really wish to make your life count, it is the place for you. It is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. A Greek philosopher thought that he could move the world with his lever if he had a place to stand upon. The Church is the *pou sto*—the place for the Christian to stand upon and move the world with the leverage of the Gospel. It is the Church of the Redeemer, Who purchased it with His own blood. It is the Church

of the Spirit, who witnesses to the truth of the Gospel and seals its benefits to believers. As a place for confession and testimony, for training in reverence, worship and song, for instruction and inspiration in the contents of the word of God, for personal growth in grace, for opportunities of communion with God, and association with kindred spirits in a unique fellowship—for all these the Church is incomparable in value. Nothing takes its place. It is more—it is the place where one may realize his highest ambitions for service. The Church is God's multiplication table. He who will throw himself earnestly into it shall be lifted to higher levels of grace and power. His one talent will count here as nowhere else. If he be more highly gifted, there is no better field for brilliant service than the Church.

A pastor long observed that one of his most thoughtful members never varied in her attendance upon services in the church. It was her habit to come early and sit quietly in her pew, apparently thinking. One day he asked her about it. This in substance is what she said. "It is the least thing I can do to show my faith in God and my gratitude to Christ. So I allow nothing to interfere with my regular presence in the house of God. I love to sit quietly in my place and think of all that has been done for me spiritually, and of how I am in duty bound to do all that I can for Christ and His Kingdom on earth. I go away refreshed

and strengthened. Often during the week I feel a sort of fragrance of the sanctuary about me."

The minister in large part is responsible for the spread of these ideas of the Church as the spiritual body of Christ. He will himself have the greatest enthusiasm for it, loving it and praising it without stint. He will teach men to respect its worship, and love its communions. He will show men that the Church needs them, and that they need the Church. He will remind them constantly that Christ is pledged to nourish His Church. He will inspire his people to build up the Church on the most holy faith, and to make it a powerful instrument for testimony and service. He will impress upon them the fact that the high calling of God in Christ is behind the Church. Christ "loved the church and gave himself up for it, that he might sanctify it . . . that he might present the church to himself a glorious church." To belong to such a spiritual body is to be linked with the purpose of God, both now and in the time of glorious fulfilment that is to come.

Members of the Church are not to think of it as common or ordinary. It is a most extraordinary and glorious place, to be held in highest reverence and affection. The words of the Psalmist should often be on the lips of members, "How amiable are thy tabernacles." Their love for the Church should be high and fine, a shining and beautiful spiritual experience. It is at least an infelicity of

our time that "support" of the Church has come so largely to mean financial gifts. It means this and with emphasis too, but support of the Church is much more than this. It is loving and serving and supporting it in the spirit in which Christ gave Himself for the Church.

It must be admitted that our ideals of membership need heightening and stiffening. This is one task of evangelism. The Church has too many loosely attached members. They have merely joined the organization. They are enrolled—that is all. They are not built into the life of the Church. They folded their hands in peaceful rest when they became members. They have a name that they live, but are dead. Evangelism can do nothing finer than to rouse the sleeping members of the Church. "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead." But if some of its members are dead, the Church itself is not dead. The Spirit of God is in the Church. When and where the Spirit is there is life. The great hours of the Church are before it. The Lord is leading it, calling it. New doors are opening. More than ever before the Church is needed. Its worship, its spiritual training, its hostility to sin and love of righteousness, its prophecies and visions, its preaching, its song, its sacraments, its communion with God—if the world should lose these precious things, truly it would lose its soul. Better members—always better. Not the Book of Numbers,


recounting the statistics, but the Apocalypse, with its high vision and victory of Christ and the blood-bought throng. Not quantity but quality. Not bars let down: rather standards lifted up.

It was a time of bondage and spiritual desolation for Israel in Ezra's day. But the people had arisen nevertheless and rebuilt the Temple. One day when Ezra was praying he rejoiced that now they had "a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." How more than beautiful is this picture of membership in the Church—"a nail in his holy place."

Its buildings may be plain, lacking in ornament. No cathedral vastness, no spacious reaches in aisles and ceilings, no light streaming in through pictures of glory. Nevertheless the Church is the Palace Beautiful. There is no higher honour that comes to the children of men than to be members here, joined not to an institution, but rooted and built up in Christ.

XXI

KEEPING OLD WELLS OPEN

HE twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis is devoted to digging wells. Or rather to keeping old wells open by digging them again. Incidentally the character of Isaac, who is commonly regarded as the weakest of the patriarchs, shines in a strong light. The Philistines had done a dreadful thing for a pastoral country—they had stopped a number of wells by filling them with earth. What was more—they were Abraham's wells, and that was a sore grief to Isaac. To his credit it is said that "Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham." He had to fight for some of them, but his sentiment for his father's wells armed him for the struggle. Blessed be the memory of a man who counted it worth while to keep the old wells open.

It is the choking of the wells of life that is giving us so much trouble in our time. The story of multitudes of people, so far as religion is concerned, is the story of choked wells. Every town and city has its hundreds or thousands of lapsed members of the Church. The cares of the world

and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word. The lusts of other things enter in, and they are "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." To say that our age is an irreligious age is not all. It is an age in which the Philistines have stopped many of the sacred wells of our fathers. Preachers are advised in our time to preach much to broken hearts, remembering how many there are who sigh for the comforts of Zion. But there are multitudes everywhere whose religious sentiments are at low ebb. They regard but lightly the wells of their fathers. Their heritage of faith is dulled by time and neglect. They have no tenderness for the past, no imperative memories of early training, first impressions and young vows. The spiritual wells of their lives are stopped with earth. The Church must preach much to these.

If the Church is to bring such as these back to God, it must itself beware of choked wells. There is a good deal of digging of the old wells of the Gospel to be done in the Church, and roundabout the pulpit, to make and keep the water of life fresh and full.

The modern home is a place of choked wells. There are multitudes of beautiful homes all over the land. They cherish the traditions of the fathers. They are not ashamed to magnify their fathers' wells. A pastor writes about a home of this kind where he used to visit—"The father's arm-chair was there. More than that, memories of

father and mother were everywhere. Often in conversation one heard the words—‘Father did so and so: mother liked this or that.’ They were keeping up the customs of their fathers. At night, before going to bed, the old Book was opened for a few moments, and then we all knelt down for a simple prayer. It was what father and mother had done! I always had a feeling in that home that something fresh and fine was flowing like a stream out of the past.”

The home antedates the Church. The better we can make our homes, the better everything is for Church and state. If we could have a perfect alliance of three forces—the home, the Church, the school—the task of evangelism would be comparatively easy. In the ideal home love flourishes. Wisdom takes on new grace. Courtesy adds its charm. Kindness and chivalry reign. The husband is strong and tender, with the dependableness of the male stock. The wife is gracious and comforting, with the endearing quality of the female stock. The children are rich in affection, obedience and reverence, nor do they despise the instruction of their youth. The spirit of service fills the ideal home. The answer of the lips is soft, the light of the eyes shines with love. Such a home is a place—

“To teach high thoughts and amiable worth
And courtliness and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.”

Good books on the shelves stimulate intellect and refine feeling. A few pictures on the walls help to lift the curtain of the mind and reveal new secrets of imagination. A musical instrument cultivates taste, and helps the growth of the fine arts. An atmosphere of reverence prevails, the sound of prayer is not unfamiliar, and the good Book has its place. When a man at the end of his day's toil returns to his home, no matter how humble, he comes to the place where his soul is appointed to grow. At table, or under the evening lamp, with his loved ones close at hand, his heart glows with gratitude to God, and he desires for his family circle the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. The earliest of all universities is here—the evening lamp. Childhood's Church is here also—the mother's knee. When our homes are shrines of all the best that men know and hope for, then indeed there's no place like home!

A roseate picture indeed. But not impossible, not beyond human reach. All striving after the good, the best, in human homes, is clear striving after love, beauty, industry, statecraft, service, religion itself. The home is ever a deep concern of the Church. If homes grow paltry, the Church's task is increased ten-fold. The wings of the Gospel are clipped. Revival is impossible. Evangelism is futile.

What a different picture the modern home presents. Prayer has gone out. Bible reading is neg-

lected. Reverence is not taught. Obedience is forgotten. The Sabbath is not observed. Selfishness grows apace. Each one for himself. No unity, no coöperation, no spirit of service. No religious conversation. No spiritual training of children. The Church is not regarded. Attendance is irregular. "The tawdriness and ugliness" of the world roundabout. The father returning in the evening with constant talk of world values, with anxious fingering of finance, and with no hint of higher things. The mother returning to her nest with no message for her birdlings other than petty drivel of fashion and gossip. The children growing up as young worldlings in pagan surroundings. The loyalties of the home often broken. What a work for the Church to keep religion alive in the home. How can religion flourish unless the home is religious? How can revival come without the revival of the home? Choked wells in the home!

The child is the key. A minister announced among his New Year resolutions—"To give much more time, thought and energy to the children and young people of our church and community. The moulding of child life is the supreme opportunity of the Church. I want to know every boy and girl who enters our doors." A man burst in upon a minister's study one day, exclaiming, "I want to join the church. Our first child was born a few hours ago." Preach parental responsibility, the

awe of mature minds in the presence of childhood. Multiply the links of connection between home and Church. Urge beauty, fineness, loyalty, service in the home. Religious qualities these are. Good books, good manners, courtesy, hospitality, knowledge, aspiration, reverence, spiritual growth—scores of sermons are in subjects like these. Talk much about great homes for parents and children—homes that create manhood and womanhood. Home and heaven are not far apart. Storm the indifference of nominal Christian homes with true religion. As to prayer and Bible reading—never give up. Manage some time to hold a cottage prayer-meeting in a home that has little religious life. In irreligious homes it is as necessary nowadays to win the mother, as it used to be to win the father. Revivals are needed in the Church for the sake of the home. If the family altar cannot be set up, plead for grace at the table at least. If we can awaken even a whisper of prayer in the home, there is hope. Singing hymns and gospel songs in the home may open the wells. While ministers are spending much time on affairs of Church and state, the main affair is at their feet.

XXII

USING THE UNUSUAL

LET all things be done decently and in order." Church worship and preaching are essentially dignified and stately. But beware lest dignity and stateliness tie the hands of the Church, and repress the free genius and spirit of the Gospel. The following outline indicates some possibilities of the Unusual in church services.

1. Adaptations in Music. Why not occasional variety, something chosen, like a gospel song, for simplicity, directness and power of appeal?

2. Surprises in the Pulpit. Invitations for example. One may attend the average Christian church for a month without hearing a direct gospel call. An unconverted man left a city church after listening to a powerful sermon, saying to a friend—"If the doctor had given an invitation this morning I would have been the first to respond."

3. Drawing the Net. In suitable form this practice of revivalists may be used in some services of the church. A conference or inquiry meeting after evening service would be useful in many places.

4. Cottage Meetings. There is peculiar power

in group meetings of this kind held at certain seasons. Frequently they are harbingers of revival.

5. *Something New in the Prayer-Meeting.* What if it were understood that this ancient institution of the Church had at last decided to be what it says! It might grow smaller, but it might also grow stronger!

6. *Outdoor Meetings.* The steps of the church and the sidewalk, even in cities, may be made a means of grace for informal evangelistic services on spring and summer evenings.

7. *Community Meetings.* The writer has vivid boyhood memories of several churches coming together in a small park or on the court-house steps. The ministers preached. They were evangelists without knowing it. These services were somehow different, freer, more direct.

8. *The Next Step in the Sunday School.* Three out of every five scholars are lost to the Church. Now that teaching is receiving expert attention, the next step is to find ways of drawing the gospel net among the young.

9. *Small Expedients.* The day of small things is not to be despised in evangelism. Printed matter on the stands in the vestibule. Cards of information, invitation, request or decision, in the pews. Directions for reading the Bible, extracts from sermons, now and then a telling incident or illustration in the church leaflet. Silent messengers these.

10. The Unusual in Prayer. The Church hardly begins to know what great things God will do in answer to the prayer of faith. Make great ventures in prayer. Pray for large things. Ask much. Launch out into the deep. "Sanctify yourselves; for to-morrow Jehovah will do wonders among you."

In short if the Church should grow thoughtful and prayerful about its work, and should decide to make the best possible use of its own resources and means of grace, the result would be evangelism.



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